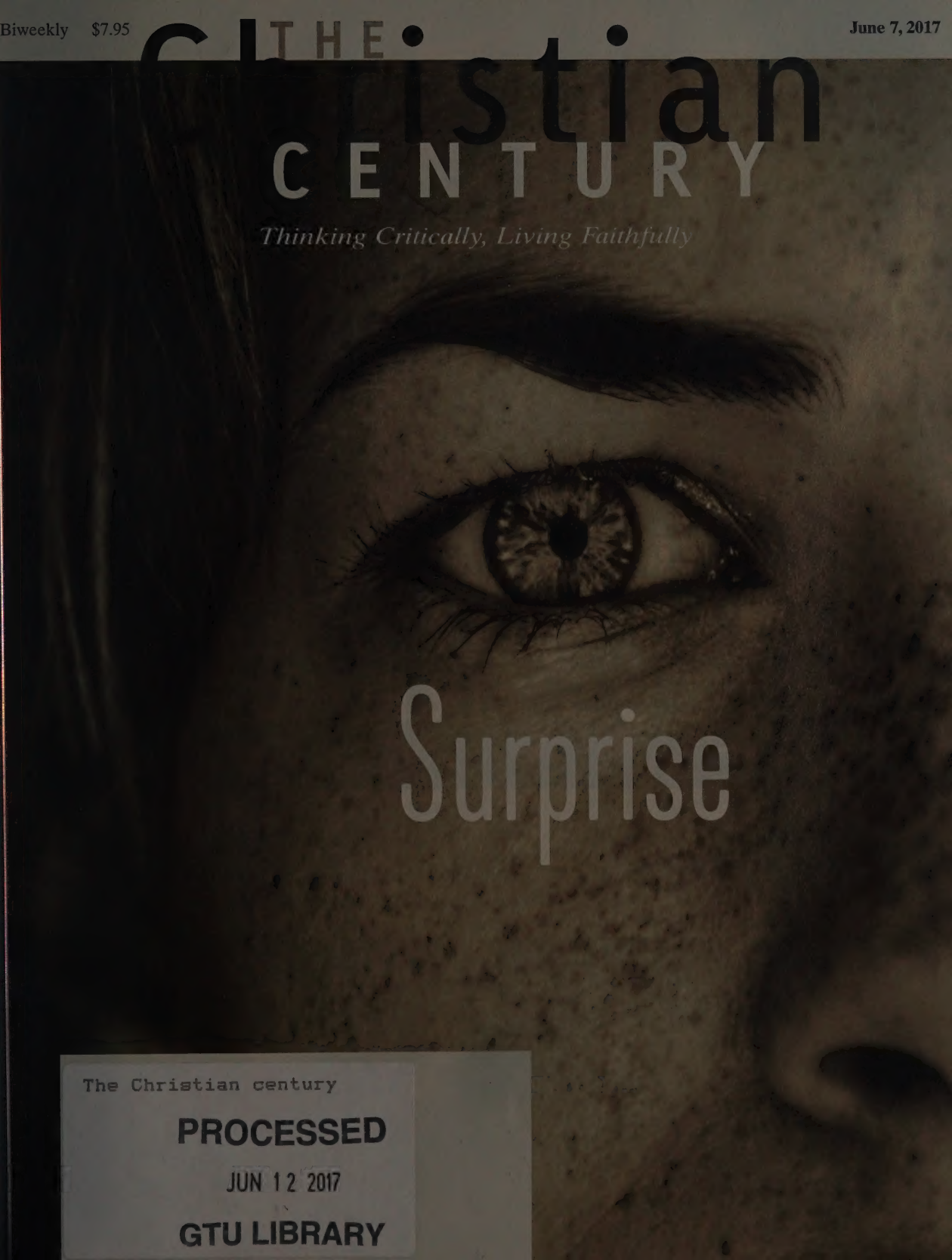


THE Christian CENTURY

Thinking Critically, Living Faithfully



Surprise

The Christian century

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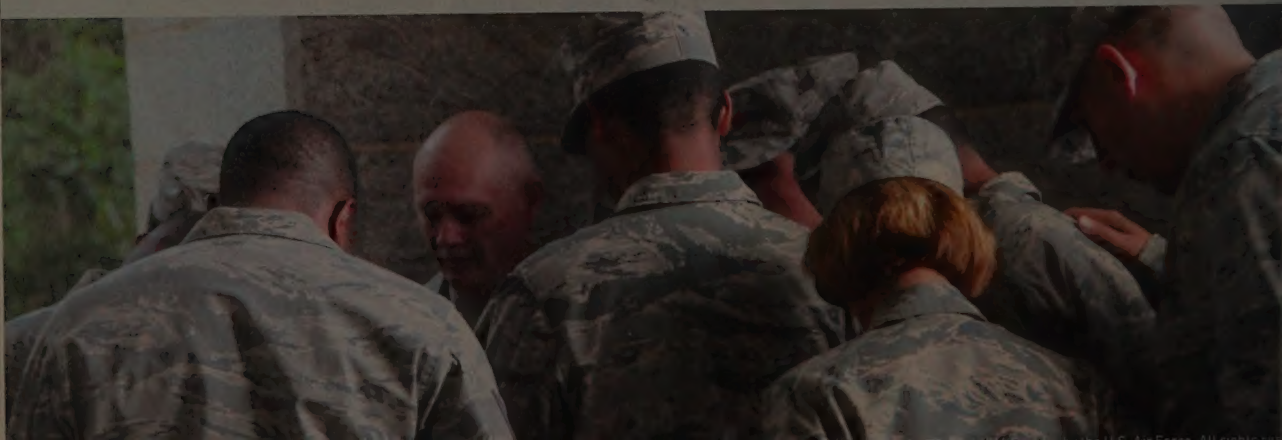


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From the publisher

Peter W. Marty

Caught by surprise

When an interviewer once asked Abraham Joshua Heschel what he believed his greatest gift was, the rabbi replied, “My ability to be surprised.” Heschel was referring to the human sense of wonder. Without awe, wonder, and amazement, he reasoned, no reverence is possible.

It turns out that our brains gravitate to surprise as much as our best religious yearnings do. Neuroscientists have discovered that we derive more pleasure from surprises than from other sensations. When human subjects in a Baylor College of Medicine study received computer-generated squirts of either tropical fruit juice or tap water in their mouths, scientists viewing the MRIs noted that it was the element of surprise—not the pleasurable effect of one taste over the other—that elicited the greatest surges of dopamine. More dopamine reached the anterior cingulate cortex of the brain when unexpected stimuli triggered a reflexive neural response.

The power of surprise is one of the reasons live sporting events keep attracting people. There is a dopamine rush every time a baseball goes flying out of the park. It’s also why we can’t tickle ourselves. Unpredictability is the key to tickling, and our brain cancels out the element of surprise when we attempt to tickle ourselves.

By intent or impulse, Donald Trump has made surprise a regular feature of his style of governance. The unpredictable nature of many of his utterances continues to yield national surges of dopamine. People across the political spectrum twitch enthusiastically or nervously with every tweet and proclamation.

When Trump spoke last month after signing his executive order on religious liberty, his words caught many believers by surprise. “For too long the federal government has used the power of the state as a weapon against people of faith,” said Trump. “We will not allow people of faith to be targeted, bullied, or silenced anymore. Under my administration . . . we are giving our churches their voices back.”

I quickly did a mental inventory of my own congregation—a politically diverse menagerie—wondering if anyone in the mix even remotely felt that we Christians are facing state-sponsored oppression in America. I couldn’t think of a soul. I asked some friends in ministry if any of them could relate to the notion that the government had somehow stolen the voice of the church and bullied its adherents. All of them seemed alarmed by the suggestion.

This dismay shouldn’t surprise. Despite the president’s threat to “totally destroy” the 1954 Johnson Amendment, with its prohibition against tax-exempt religious organizations endorsing political candidates, the executive order was empty of all such language. It lacked the punch of Trump’s Rose Garden rhetoric—just as it will prove irrelevant to most congregations. This may reflect the fact that nearly 80 percent of all Americans, and nearly 90 percent of evangelical leaders, oppose the idea of clergy endorsing political candidates. Turning the church into a political organization is apparently of little interest to most believers.

Novelist Raymond Chandler once wrote of passionate love becoming routine: “The first kiss is magic. The second is intimate. The third is routine.” It may be that our president’s surprise utterances will eventually become so routine that the dopamine rush inside our nation’s anterior cingulate cortex will all but disappear.

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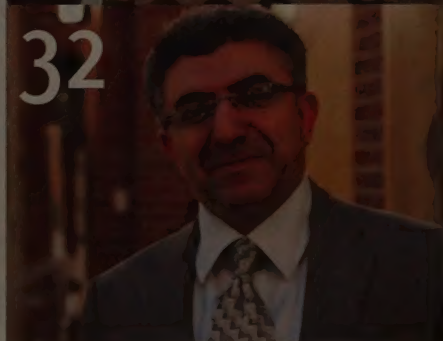
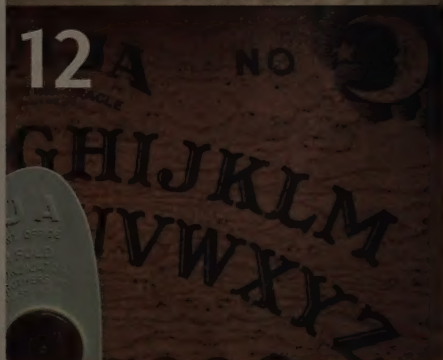
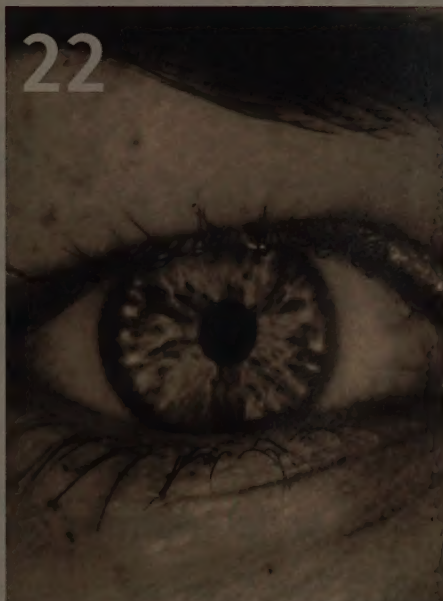
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LETTERS

Nondenominational Baptists

Regarding Philip Jenkins's comment on Baptists' relative lack of global presence ("The Baptist exception," May 10): it's possible that Baptist missions have resulted in many "nondenominational" evangelical churches that are doctrinally Baptist but don't have the name.

Adam Gonnerman

Christiancentury.org comment

Writers for our time . . .

Walter Brueggemann's comment in "Writers' feast" (May 10) about an imagined conversation between Jeremiah of Anathoth, Luther, and Lincoln captures the current state of affairs in our beleaguered country: "Such pathos as our conversation would probe pertains now in a society numbed by uncritical certitude and so absent honesty, discernment, or attentiveness." Brueggemann pierces the core of our current dilemma.

Charlotte de Lissovoy

State College, Pa.

Immaculate conception . . .

I am unsurprised by the quotation from Hillary Clinton cited in CenturyMarks (May 10). She obviously has no idea that "immaculate conception" refers to the immaculate nature of Mary and not the virgin birth of Christ.

George Sims

Lander, Wyo.

Memory verses . . .

Many years ago, I was confronted by a parent who declared that memorizing scripture was not of any benefit to her child. I tried to assure her that "scrip-



tures were like handlebars in life's journey," but she huffed away.

Craig Barnes's "Finding God at the bottom" (April 26) was riveting and continued a deep affirmation of the value of scripture. Tears flowed as once again God in Christ came alive in Barnes's journey of faith. "For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord!"

Norma Nomura DeSaegher

Ewa Beach, Hawaii

School choice . . .

Thank you for the editorial about school choice ("Does school choice help?" April 12). All parents want the best possible education for their kids, but some do not have the means to drive their kids across town. If charter schools and schools of choice are using better programs, why not adopt those techniques for our public schools, "which are charged with educating every student"?

Ivy Conklin

Monterey Park, Calif.

June 7, 2017

Together in the risk pool

Days before the House of Representatives passed the American Health Care Act, CNN's Jake Tapper interviewed Representative Mo Brooks. The AHCA bill "will allow insurance companies to require people who have higher health care costs to contribute more to the insurance pool," said the Alabama Republican, "reducing the cost to those people who lead good lives, they're healthy, they've done the things to keep their bodies healthy."

It's a statement that raises a list of problems. The most obvious is that a healthy lifestyle very often does not result in good health. Some catastrophic illnesses and injuries are preventable; many are not. The rain falls on the prudent and the reckless alike.

What's more, Brooks's moralizing—his summary of healthy choices as "leading a good life"—is a shaky foundation for public policy. Which choices are good enough, and how consistently must you make them? How often can you skip your workout or cheat on your diet before you no longer deserve the decent insurance enjoyed by the healthy?

And even granting the kernel of truth here—yes, personal choices are a factor—it's quite a leap to single this out as the primary factor. David Ansell, a physician who has worked in public hospitals, argues in *The Death Gap* that health outcomes are largely tied to class, which determines what level of care particular people can afford. Brooks's implication is that separate insurance pools for the sick will help address health disparities (by incentivizing people to stay among the healthy). But if the AHCA's goal were to address the causes of health disparities, it would have to address the economic deprivation that blocks so many Americans' access to care.

In fact, it does just the opposite. The biggest problem with Brooks's quote is the policy he ably explains: the AHCA ghettoizes sick people so that healthy people don't have to subsidize them. That is, it makes insurance less like mutual aid and more like an exclusive and exclusionary service. Then, to double down, it makes drastic cuts to Medicaid, the major provider of health insurance to the poor, people with disabilities, and elders in need of long-term care.

In short, the bill makes health insurance do less for the people who need it most, or simply takes it away—all to pay for tax cuts for the rich. But that's hard to sell, so House leaders are selling it as technocratic health-care reform—though it's

hard to find a health-care industry group or policy analyst that supports it.

When the disciples see a man born blind, they ask Jesus whose fault it is, that of the man or his parents. Neither, says Jesus: the point isn't personal fault but "that God's works might be revealed in him." How are God's works revealed today amid sickness and suffering? Surely one way is when people care for one another in communities of mutual aid—where the strong hold up the weak, knowing that sooner or later their own weakness will flare up, too.

Medical catastrophes happen to the prudent and reckless alike.

CENTURY marks

PROPERTY RIGHTS: Jesuits are returning 525 acres of land in South Dakota to the Rosebud Sioux. The land, given to the Jesuits in the 1880s by the U.S. government to be used for churches and cemeteries, is scattered throughout the 900,000-acre Rosebud reservation. At one point there were 23 Catholic missions on the land (CNS).

NEWS DIVIDE: Americans are deeply divided along partisan lines in their attitudes toward the news media. In a recent poll, Democrats were 47 points more likely than Republicans to believe the news media have a government

watchdog role. During Democratic administrations, Republicans are more likely to agree the news media have a watchdog role, but the difference has never been as great as it is now. Pew has been polling on this issue since 1985 (Pew Research Center, May 10).

GEOGRAPHY TEST: Americans who can identify where North Korea is on a map are more inclined to favor diplomacy and other nonmilitary options with North Korea than those who don't know where it is. The nonmilitary strategies include economic sanctions, cyberattacks against military targets in North

Korea, and increased pressure on China to use its influence on North Korea. Those who can find the renegade country on the map are also more likely to disagree with the notion that the United States should do nothing. In the poll, conducted by Morning Consult, more Republican men could identify North Korea on a map than Democratic men. Women in each party responded similarly (*New York Times*, May 14).

TAKING A STAND: Jacob Dorman, who taught history and American studies at the University of Kansas for a decade, resigned to protest a rule allowing concealed weapons in the classroom. In an open letter to the state, Dorman said that controversial subjects are discussed in classes, and discussion can get heated. Free speech will be squelched, he said, if students are worried that other students are carrying weapons. He's taken a job in another state that bans guns in the classroom (*Topeka Capital-Journal*, May 5).

A NIEBUHRIAN? James Comey, the recently deposed director of the FBI, uses the name "Reinhold Niebuhr" on his private Twitter and Instagram accounts. The Catholic-turned-Methodist wrote his senior thesis at the College of William and Mary comparing Niebuhr and Jerry Falwell on the role of Christians in politics. According to Comey, "Niebuhr believed that 'the Christian and politics are made for each other'—indeed, that the Christian is 'the perfect political animal.'" K. Healan Gaston, president of the Niebuhr Society, says this view has long predominated among Niebuhr's conservative enthusiasts, who read him as urging Christians to exert political leadership,



"Today, I'll be cherry-picking from Deuteronomy."

despite the moral ambiguities of politics. What they tend to overlook is Niebuhr's emphasis on sin and human fallibility (RNS).

SANCTUARY: Jeanette Vizguerra, a Mexican mother of four, sought sanctuary in the First Baptist Church in Denver three months ago to avoid deportation. She left the church in mid-May after immigration officials promised she could remain in the United States for two years. She came to the United States 20 years ago without authorization and worked as a janitor before becoming owner of a moving company. Citing her act of taking refuge at the church, *Time* magazine named her one of the 100 most influential people of 2017. She also has been an advocate for immigrants (Reuters).

MYANMAR REFUGEES: Christian refugees from Myanmar are the major group receiving asylum in the United States. One out of four refugees in the last ten years have come from what formerly was called Burma. They mostly come from the eastern part of Myanmar, a jungle area strewn with landmines. Due to the efforts of 19th-century American missionaries, many of these immigrants are Baptists. One Myanmar refugee said he can't understand President Trump's anti-immigrant stance. "We just want to work hard and go to church," he said (PRI).

HISTORIC MOVE: After two years of negotiations, the Roman Catholic Church and China are getting closer to an agreement to reestablish ties, perhaps even formal diplomatic relations, through a unified Catholic Church in China. The deal would be good for the Catholic Church, since there are as many as 10 million Catholics in China, and an association with Pope Francis could elevate China's moral standing. Taiwan would be the big loser, since forming diplomatic relations with China would mean the Vatican would have to cut ties with Taiwan (*Newsweek*, May 2).

GROWTH MARKET: Religious books for children is one of the few growing

“If your baby is going to die and it doesn't have to, it shouldn't matter how much money you make.”

— Comedian **Jimmy Kimmel**, tearfully reporting that he and his wife's newborn baby has a heart condition and arguing that people with preexisting health conditions should be able to get health insurance (CNN, May 3)

“We can debate whether to call Donald Trump's circle of advisers a court, but the president of the United States certainly has his fair share of courtiers. Many of them are evangelical Christian leaders.”

— **John Fea**, a historian at Messiah College (RNS)

genres in the book publishing world. Religious-themed board books, story-book Bibles, and devotional books for children are doing particularly well. Sales for children's religious books jumped 22 percent between 2013 and 2016. The market for books that introduce children to multiple religions is also growing (*The Christian Science Monitor*, May 11).

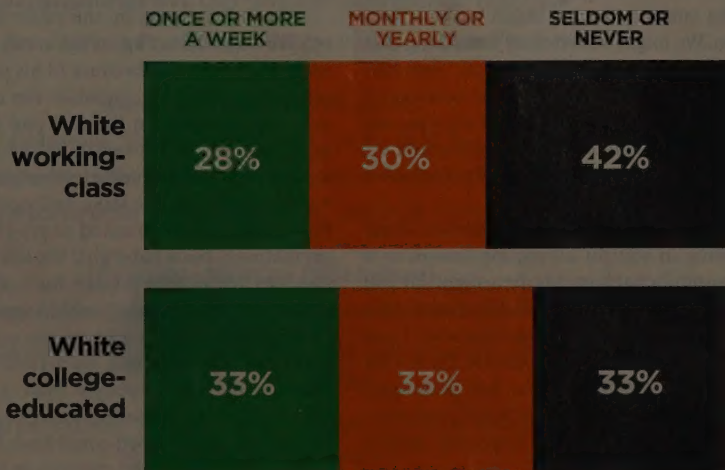
INSPIRATIONAL: The *Literary Hub* (April 26) found out what books had inspired some prominent writers to

become writers. The writers and the books that inspired them include Zadie Smith—*Hurricane*, by Andrew Salkey; Sue Monk Kidd—*Jane Eyre*, by Charlotte Brontë; Jodi Picoult—*Gone with the Wind*, by Margaret Mitchell; David Sedaris—*When We Talk about When We Talk about Love*, by Raymond Carver; Sofia Samatar—*Gormenghast*, by Mervyn Peake; Tom Wolfe—*Napoleon*, by Emil Ludwig; Richard Ford—*Absalom, Absalom!* by William Faulkner; and Anne Lamott—*Nine Stories*, by J. D. Salinger.

CHURCH ATTENDANCE

SOURCE: PRRI

White, working-class Americans report lower levels of church attendance.



Jumping into the chaos of life with God

Out-of-control ministry

by Charles Lattimore Howard

IT CARRIES US AWAY.

Outside of the cities we live in. Outside of ourselves. The river is ecstatic. Jumping in, we risk everything. We risk losing ourselves. We risk not coming back. We risk sinking to the bottom. We risk allowing the Current to guide us rather than being guided by our own feet on the banks.

From time to time I sit on the banks of the river that runs through my city. Those who first walked this land and those who first swam this river named it Toolpay Hanna, which in the language of the Lenape means "Turtle River." When the river was (re)discovered by the exploring Dutch, they named it the Schuylkill River, which means "Hidden River." Leaving my desk, I find my way to its banks. And sit. And dream. And imagine what it would be like to jump in. I'm a good swimmer. I'd be fine. But that isn't going deeper. I want more than just a brief dip in the waters.

Faith is jumping in and letting the Current take us where It wants. It's dangerous. There are painful rocks beneath the surface that we might strike a foot on. We might be bitten by something that dwells within. We might go over the waterfall. We might not come back out of the river. While trusting and allowing the Current to guide us brings life and love, there is a cost. That cost is the forfeiture of our perceived control.

I first contemplated this notion of not being in control during my season as a hospital chaplain. My first night on call at the hospital where I did clinical pastoral education, I had no idea what I was getting into. I had just turned 23. A year before I was living in a frat house and finishing up college, and now I was visiting hospital patients, baptizing babies, and giving last rites.

For our first overnight on-call shift, the young chaplain interns in my program were given the opportunity to shadow a veteran chaplain. The gentleman I shadowed was a Lutheran pastor who felt called to chaplaincy. He was about 40 and had been at the hospital for two years. I remember the anxiety I felt when the rest of the chaplaincy department left at the end of the workday, leaving the two of us to keep watch over the whole hospital. We began by making rounds on each of the floors, checking in

sheets might have been one of my grandmothers. She had a stillness known only to those who are minutes from seeing God.

After brief introductions, we held hands in a circle and my mentor chaplain offered a prayer commending her soul to God "from whence she came." While we were still in prayer, the machines signaled to us that she had passed away. After hugs and condolences, my teaching chaplain and I left the room. Standing by the elevator, he asked how that was for

Sometimes I am tempted to swim to shore and explore other vocations.

with each department's head nurse to see if there were any patients who could use a visit. These cold-call visits brought us in touch with people who were awaiting surgery, recovering from surgery, being treated for heart trouble, waiting to deliver a baby, and more.

About two hours in, the pager went off. We were called up to the room of a man who was afraid because of his pending surgery. I kept quiet while the more experienced chaplain listened and tried to be present with everything the man was feeling. In the middle of our prayer we were called to the labor and delivery floor, where we were asked to pray for a prematurely born baby girl. We left that room to respond to a page for a dying woman whose family wanted prayer. Nearly out of breath after racing up the stairs and down the hall, we arrived at a room holding more people than it was designed to. The African-American family surrounding the bed could have been my own. The aged saint covered in white

me. He must have seen the tears on my face. I replied: "It was beautiful and painful. Awe-filled and scary. And if I'm being honest, it pushed a few of my buttons with my mom and my dad both passing aw—." I didn't even finish my thought before the pager went off again, alerting us to the fact that a trauma patient was on the way to the hospital.

With speed, we made our way down the stairs and through various shortcuts that I would later use during future on-call nights. On the way to the emergency room there was a long hallway whose walls were painted with a slightly out-of-place mural of a light blue sky. The sky in the mural was filled with butterflies, birds, flowers, and other peaceful signs of nature. While walking this long hallway, reeling from the chaotic pace of an evening that would not

Charles Lattimore Howard is the chaplain at the University of Pennsylvania. This essay is excerpted from his just-published book Pond River Ocean Rain. © 2017 by Abingdon Press.

even permit me a moment to process my feelings, I flippantly said, "Man, this is out of control." The chaplain stopped and turned to me and said something that I have never forgotten.

"Not being in control is a part of the discipline."

It takes a calm discipline to be able to ride the sometimes wild and uncontrollable Current of the river. I do not claim to be totally at peace with it, but what that chaplain told me has proved to be wise counsel and an important challenge over the course of my life.

There is certainly a rhythm to ministry. Annual holy days and weekly ser-

vices provide an important consistency to the vocation. As a university chaplain, I move along an academic calendar, with convocation at the beginning of the year, midterms, fall break, finals, and then winter break. We resume with the second semester, spring break, midterms again, finals once again, and then graduation before entering the much-welcomed summer recess. In late August, we start all over again.

And yet, there are holy interruptions. Some are simply individuals dropping by the office because they need to talk. They might interrupt sermon planning or some of the other quieter aspects of ministry

and life. Other interruptions are more jarring, like the middle-of-the-night phone call alerting you to an accident.

The times when I have found myself too often interrupted by the more serious kind of holy interruptions are the times I tend to explore other job possibilities. What I learned that first night of CPE was true: ministry truly does have moments when it is out of control. I have been tempted to swim to the banks of this vocational river and climb out. But staying within the out-of-control-ness of ministry and the out-of-control-ness of life is an important discipline for all of us to swim through.

CC

The *Christian Century* wins "Best in Class"

The CENTURY was named "Best in Class" among national and international Christian magazines by the ACP at its April 2017 convention. And the CENTURY was honored in eight other categories for its work in 2016:

Award of Excellence (first place)

Opinion/editorial writing: "Unprohibited speech" (July 20)

Audio: *Preachers on Preaching* podcasts, hosted by Matt Fitzgerald

Award of Merit (second place)

Columns: "From the publisher," by Peter W. Marty

Website redesign: Steve Thorngate and CENTURY staff

Photo with article: "Deferred dreams," photo by Theo Stroomer

Honorable Mention (third place)

Magazine website: Steve Thorngate, Celeste Kennel-Shank, Elizabeth Palmer, and CENTURY staff

Profile: "Unshakeable in Uganda: A lesbian activist navigates church and politics," by Jeff Chu (August 31)

Biblical interpretation: "Biblical farce: The book of Esther laughs at empire," by Debbie Blue (January 20)

The night I met Jesus on a Ouija board

Conjuring God

by Peter S. Hawkins

THERE IS A MOMENT close to the center of Matthew, Mark, and Luke when Jesus asks his disciples to say who they think he is. It's a strange question. By this point in their time together so much had already happened: miracles of every kind, sermons on the mountain and on the plain, conflicts with religious leaders, powerful demonstrations of spiritual authority, teaching. And yet after all this, as the disciples made their way toward yet another village in Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asks them not only what strangers think he is all about—how he's doing in the polls—but what the disciples themselves make of him.

It's all very well that some in the crowd think that he is John the Baptist come back from the dead, or Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the other ancient prophets. But this isn't what he's after. Instead, he insists on going personal and, in the present tense, he asks, "But who do you say that I am?" (Matt. 16:15).

His point-blank question is, of course, meant to put them on the spot, to provoke an honest response. When Peter gives it—"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God"—he offers the answer on which the church is built. But just as vital as the answer, I think, is the question itself, "But who do you say that I am?" It's important that Jesus asks this not at the beginning of his relationship with the disciples but well down the road, and indeed not far from the end. It is as if to know who Jesus is means having to ask about him again and again; it means accepting the fact that you can never quite "get" him; it means acknowledging your need to know him for yourself and know him today.

And maybe it also means asking who he is outside of church, asking it any-

place where you find yourself in need or at a loss, anyplace where the answers are not already lined up and waiting for you to choose among them. It may mean that you need to step out of line, away from piety, and at a distance from all the received wisdom you have inherited.

What if, perhaps only for a moment, you let go of the bearded man in the stained-glass window. Let go of the "personal Lord and Savior" you could never quite get into your heart no matter how hard you tried. What if you put to the side, respectfully, the Second

friends. (The board was given to Merrill by his best friend from high school, Frederick Buechner.)

Together Merrill and Jackson, plying the Ouija board with an inverted Blue Willow teacup, would contact spirits in an afterlife that may only have been their conjoined imagination. Night by night, and over the course of 40 years, they conjured a community of figures that included favorite poets, parents, deceased friends, and a host of other spirits who showed up on the board from . . . from where? Whatever one makes of

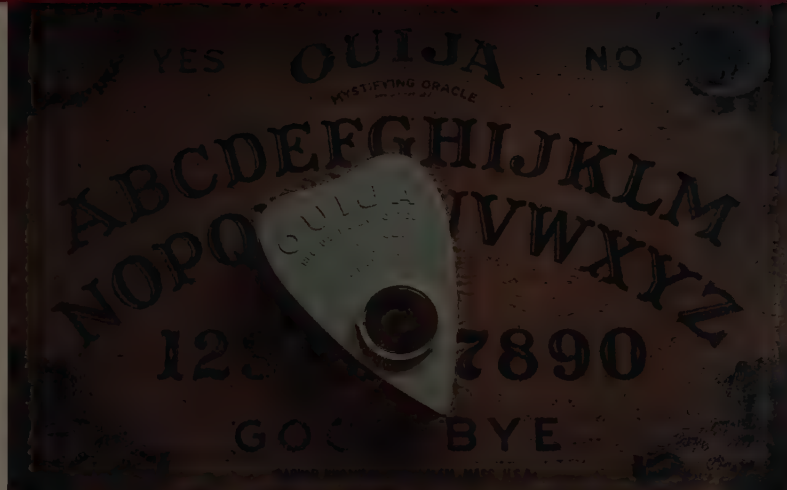
Jesus is at once God's question and God's answer.

Person of the Blessed Trinity, Christ the King and Christ the Liberator, the one who "is named Wonderful, Counselor, Prince of Peace," the Man of Sorrows, even (my favorite) Dietrich Bonhoeffer's "Man for Others." What if you risked asking, quite simply—and without being sure of the answer—"Who is Jesus Christ?"

Once upon a time I did. In the late 1970s I was at the beginning of my teaching career at Yale Divinity School and visiting friends who were housesitting in Stonington, Connecticut. Our absent host was the poet James Merrill, a friend of my friends, who was then in the process of writing what would become, by 1982, a three-part, 560-page epic poem, *The Changing Light at Sandover*. Crucial to its composition was a Ouija board that became the stage for sessions of serious play undertaken by Merrill and his partner David Jackson, not only on their own but often in the company of

its origins, the monumental poem that emerged from this is like nothing else in literature (although Dante's *Divine Comedy* does come to mind).

Needless to say, the friends with whom I was visiting—both of whom were poets—took their housesitting as an opportunity to imitate the master: where was that Ouija board? For three days I watched the two of them sitting across from one another at Merrill's dining room table. Each touched lightly the overturned teacup, whose handle served as a pointer to one place or another on the board. Taking turns, they asked their questions. In response, and to my utter incredulity, the cup shuttled purposefully, quickly, between vowels and consonants and the words *yes* and *no*. One of them took down the barrage of letters and symbols with his spare hand—a line of script that later would be divided into words and sentences. It all happened too fast for me to think that



they were able to make it up on the spot. But what else could they be doing?

As young poets, my friends predictably brought questions to the Ouija board about the writers they loved (some of whom they managed to contact, or so it seemed). For my sake they asked about Dante, but without result. In his case, an afterlife door slammed shut: Dante was, as the board spelled out, "TOO HIGH." I was stunned. If this was the unconscious taking over, it was definitely better than anything we had come up with in graduate school. But oddly enough, despite my literary training and passion for poetry, it was not really about literature that I wanted to know.

Throughout the weekend I watched them, dumbfounded, as an observer. By Sunday evening it finally got to be my turn. Didn't I want, they asked, to try the board myself? Of course for three days I had been waiting for the invitation; but I was also fearful of what it would mean for me to put my fingers on the overturned teacup and then let go. Wouldn't this be King Saul and the Witch of Endor all over again—a forbidden consorting with familiar spirits, a defilement with wizards and mediums? (We all know how that turned out for King Saul.) Besides, what if they ever heard about this at Yale Divinity School? Good-bye tenure.

Beginning to sweat, I sat myself down at the table, joined one of my friends at the board, put my hands on the Blue Willow cup, and shut my eyes. After a little while the cup began to move in slow circles, though without apparent direction from my friend and with absolutely no help from me. Then he said, "OK, Peter, what do you want to ask?"

To my embarrassment I found that despite three days of waiting for my chance, I had not actually formulated a question. I was there on the board, a teacup under my fingers, and nothing in mind. Until all of a sudden I realized that there was, in fact, only one thing I wanted to ask, a question I had never asked before, which was so deeply buried in me that I was astonished once I heard myself put it into words. It was as if in that moment I was discovering something about myself I didn't know, some hunger.

I opened my eyes and heard myself ask, "Who is Jesus Christ?"

The cup stopped tracing circles and then began to dart quickly (as if with a mind of its own) to the letters H, E, I, S, T, H — moving faster and faster until I could hardly keep up with it, but not so fast that the friend playing scribe could not copy down the letters and then decipher the message they formed. "Who is Jesus Christ?" I had asked. And the answer? "HE IS THE LENS IN THE DARK BOX."

Can any good thing come off a Ouija board? Previously, I should not have thought so. The whole business was a parlor trick of another generation become, in the crazy 1970s, the pastime of poets who were out of my league. And yet, one Sunday night almost 40 years ago—with a teacup under my fingers and sweat pouring down my face—my natural skepticism, my Episcopalian rationality, my scriptural scruples, all met their match. I couldn't dismiss what I had learned there about myself, let alone about Jesus Christ, as either the work of demons or mere "hoodoo voodoo." Rather, I was taken someplace where I wouldn't otherwise have gone on my own. I was blindsided by the Holy Spirit.

Not that I should have been entirely surprised by the weirdness of the context, for isn't the Word of the Lord invariably spoken in impossible situations and inappropriate places: to an ancient couple with an old woman's barren womb, in a death valley crowded with bones that are very dry, to a girl

from a nowhere like Nazareth, at a public execution? Is anything too absurd or too embarrassing for the Lord?

Or is anything too metaphorical? Are any of Jesus' names other than mysteries spelled out in letters, concealed in syllables and symbols? John the Baptist wonders if he is the "one who is to come." Peter confesses him in one Gospel to be the Messiah, in another to be the Holy One of God. For others he was Master, Rabbi, Son of David, Son of Man, Son of God, King of the Jews—"the lily of the valley, the bright and morning star, the fairest of ten thousand." And what did he call himself (with echoes of the divine "I am that I am" [Exod. 3:14])? "I am the bread that comes down from heaven," "I am the light of the world," "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

But for me, having asked "Who is Jesus Christ?" in a highly improbable setting, he is first and foremost the lens in the dark box. He is the imaginable focus who enables me to conjure an unimaginable God. He is the human prism in whom a transcendent divine light becomes a set of shoulders overturning a table of money changers, a finger writing in the dust, a back being scourged, a voice in extremis crying out the words of a psalm. He is an aperture, an opening up of a darkness I cannot fathom. He is at once God's question and God's answer. He is the lens in the dark box. CC

Peter S. Hawkins teaches at Yale Divinity School.

His books include Undiscovered Country: Imagining the World to Come.

Religious liberty order draws mixed reviews

In a Rose Garden ceremony at the White House on the National Day of Prayer, President Trump signed a highly anticipated executive order on religious liberty, basking in the praise of religious leaders who blessed his action as an answer to their prayers.

"It was looking like you'd never get here, folks, but you got here!" a triumphant Trump told the May 4 gathering after a series of invocations from Baptist and Catholic leaders and from Paula White, the prosperity gospel televangelist who is one of Trump's main religious advisers.

Yet social conservatives who had been expecting more expressed sharp disappointment, and the order itself may not have much real impact on current laws and regulations, such as the Johnson Amendment, the 1954 law that threatens nonprofits with the loss of their tax-exempt status if they engage in electioneering.

Trump's order is "constitutionally dubious, dangerously misleading, and ultimately harmful to the very cause that it purports to protect," David French wrote in the *National Review*. "In fact, he should tear it up, not start over, and do the actual real statutory and regulatory work that truly protects religious liberty."

Even the ACLU, which initially vowed to file suit against the order, later reversed course, saying the order had nothing in it that could be challenged. It was, ACLU executive director Anthony Romero said, "an elaborate photo-op with no discernible policy outcome."

The order does not attempt to provide exemptions for religious groups or businesses that object to LGBT anti-discrimination laws, such as bakers or florists who refuse to provide wedding services for same-sex couples.

Moreover, the new order carefully hedges its language on the two points of policy that it does address, the contraception mandate in health-care regulations and the Johnson Amendment.

For example, it asks the secretary of health and human services to "consider issuing amended regulations" to provide relief from the contraception mandate within the constraints of "applicable law"—that law currently being the health-care law passed under President Obama.

Regarding the Johnson Amendment, the order says: "All executive departments and agencies shall, to the greatest extent practicable and to the extent permitted by law, respect and protect the freedom of persons and organizations to engage in religious and political speech." The order asks the Treasury Department, of which the IRS is a part, not to take adverse action against such people and organizations, including removal of tax-exempt status, but again, "to the extent permitted by law."

Trump has painted a picture of religious believers facing virtual state-sponsored oppression under his predecessor because of the Johnson Amendment and other laws, saying that any pastor who spoke about "issues of public or political importance" was threatened with devastating financial consequences. In reality, the IRS has only investigated houses of worship for political speech a handful of times. And in the past 60 years, only one church has lost its tax exemption for politicking.

Congregations ranging from liberal African-American churches to conservative Catholic parishes have routinely spoken out on political issues, and pastors have openly endorsed candidates without fear of retribution from the IRS or any other federal agency.

Also, surveys show that a majority of Americans—about eight in ten—do not want houses of worship engaging in partisan political campaigning, and opposition to such electioneering is even higher among clergy themselves. In short, few believe the Johnson Amendment is much of a problem, and many of those who do don't think Trump's executive order is much of a solution.

Douglas Laycock, a law professor at the University of Virginia School of Law and a religious freedom scholar who is respected across the political spectrum, noted that the order's language on the Johnson Amendment "does not say that churches should be allowed to endorse candidates. It says only that they should not be found guilty of implied endorsements on facts where secular organizations would not be. I have heard no stories of that happening." —David Gibson, Religion News Service

Pope visits Egypt to join imams, Coptic church in rejecting violence

Pope Francis used the political capital he has built up with the Islamic world to issue a powerful condemnation of religion-inspired violence, calling on Muslim leaders to unite against terrorist acts.

Francis made his remarks April 28 at an international peace conference held at Al-Azhar, a tenth-century mosque and university in Cairo that is a globally influential center of Sunni Muslim learning. The pontiff's speech opened a two-day trip that came less than three weeks after Palm Sunday attacks on two Coptic

Christian churches in Egypt that left 45 dead and scores injured.

"Let us say once more a firm and clear 'No!' to every form of violence, vengeance, and hatred carried out in the name of God," the pope said.

The 80-year-old pope condemned "demagogic forms of populism" and the arms trade for fueling terrorism and conflict while calling for education of young people that will "turn the polluted air of hatred into the oxygen of fraternity."

Following the pope's address to the peace conference, he embraced Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb, the grand imam of Al-Azhar mosque, an image of Muslim-Christian fraternity that had echoes of St. Francis of Assisi's mission to Islamic leader Sultan Al-Kamil 800 years ago.

Francis's consistent refusal to link the Islamic faith per se to terrorism has made the Muslim world take notice. Egypt is the seventh Muslim-majority country Francis has visited since he became pope.

His speech at Al-Azhar was frequently interrupted with applause.

"He knows that the only effective way for his message of peace to touch the hearts of the larger global community is to speak together with leaders of other religious communities," said Gabriel Said Reynolds, a professor of Islamic studies at the University of Notre Dame, who took part in a recent Vatican-Muslim forum at Al-Azhar. At the same time, "it is not clear what kind of an impact a Catholic pope can have in reaching the hearts of Muslims who are attracted by extremist ideology, even if the pope is speaking with the grand imam of Al-Azhar."

Al-Azhar's leaders are actively trying to reduce extremism in Islam. They are revered for their expertise in interpreting the Qur'an, which is key to countering the largely Sunni-inspired ideologues of the self-described Islamic State, who use scripture to justify terrorist violence. But these religious leaders also face an uphill task and a power struggle with the Egyptian government over who gets to reform what.

President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi has made it his business to keep a lid on extremist violence since taking power in a 2013 coup that overthrew the country's



INTERFAITH PEACE EFFORTS: Pope Francis (right) embraces Grand Imam Ahmed el-Tayeb of Al-Azhar mosque during a conference in Cairo on April 28. Al-Azhar mosque and university are home to many influential Sunni Muslim leaders, who joined with the pope and others in denouncing violence in the name of religion.

first democratically elected president, Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood. El-Sisi's administration has, for example, tightly controlled the content of Friday sermons delivered at the country's 100,000 mosques in an effort to curb growing fanaticism. It has not, however, stopped ISIS from picking off disaffected members of the Brotherhood.

What all this underscores is how intertwined religious problems are with the politics of Egypt, a phenomenon that is common across the Arab world. This is also a special challenge to those in the secular West who think that if religious faith were sidelined, then the problems go away.

The challenge for religion, Francis said at Al-Azhar, is finding a balance between the public and personal realms.

"Religion tends to be relegated to the private sphere, as if it were not an essential dimension of the human person and society," Francis said. "At the same time . . . religion risks being absorbed into the administration of temporal affairs and tempted by the allure of worldly powers that in fact exploit it."

In this context, the pope urged Egyptian Christians to be a positive

force within society; to be people of dialogue who are "sowers of hope" and able to forgive those who wrong them.

This is no easy task given the increased vulnerability of Egypt's 9 million Christians, the vast majority of whom are Coptic Orthodox. Nevertheless, Francis said that "true faith" makes people "more merciful, more honest, and more humane" and that the only fanaticism for a religious believer should be that of charity.

In Cairo, Francis reprised a favorite phrase about an "ecumenism of blood" between Catholic martyrs and Orthodox ones while signing a joint declaration with the Coptic Orthodox pope, Tawadros II, recognizing a common baptism among their believers.

Perhaps even more significant, however, was the historic moment when Francis, Tawadros, and Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, the leader of Eastern Orthodoxy, sat together during an ecumenical prayer service. It is believed to be the first time these leaders of three ancient streams of Christianity have shared a platform, and it represented a united front in defense of their flocks. —Christopher Lamb, Religion News Service

Duke Divinity professor disciplined amid complaint over antiracism event

Duke Divinity School has taken disciplinary action against a professor who wrote in an email to all faculty that a racial equity training event they had been encouraged to attend was “definitively anti-intellectual” and had “totalitarian tendencies.”

When the conflict became public, someone at the divinity school sent the full text of several emails and images of printed letters to Rod Dreher at the American Conservative, who in turn published them on his blog.

Anathea Portier-Young, associate professor of Old Testament, on behalf of the Faculty Diversity and Inclusion Standing Committee, invited her colleagues to the equity training event in March, paid for and hosted by the school, saying that “we hope that this will be a first step in a longer process of working to ensure that DDS is an institution that is both equitable and anti-racist in its practices and culture.”

The Racial Equity Institute says on its website that it offers the training to help “leaders and organizations who want to proactively understand and address racism, both in their organization and in the community where the organization is working.”

Paul J. Griffiths, professor of Catholic theology, in an email replying to all, “in the interests of free exchange,” said: “I exhort you not to attend this training. It’ll be, I predict with confidence, intellectually flaccid; there’ll be bromides, clichés, and amen-corner rah-rahs in plenty.”

He went on to compare the training to communist reeducation of intellectuals by “bureaucrats and apparatchiks.” He also wrote that the training was a distraction from the faculty’s mission to think, “read, write, and

teach about the true Lord of Christian confession.”

Elaine Heath, dean of the divinity school, then weighed in to support the event as “increasing our school’s intellectual strength, spiritual vitality, and moral authority,” before reproving use of the faculty email list to make disparaging statements.

“The use of mass emails to express racism, sexism, and other forms of bigotry is offensive and unacceptable,” she wrote. “As St. Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, regardless of how exquisite our gifts are, if we do not exercise them with love our words are just noise.”

Griffiths then wrote to his colleagues again, releasing the message on social media, saying that two disciplinary proceedings had been instituted against him, one by Heath and the other by Portier-Young through the university’s Office for Institutional Equity. The latter complaint charged Griffiths with harassment through “racist and/or sexist speech,” creating a hostile workplace. Griffiths wrote that the action by Heath and Portier-Young “shows totalitarian affinities in its preferred method, which is the veiled use of institutional power. They appeal to non- or anti-intellectual categories (‘unprofessional conduct’ in Heath’s case; ‘harassment’ in Portier-Young’s) to short-circuit disagreement.”

Citing the confidentiality of personnel issues, Michael Schoenfeld, Duke University vice president for public affairs and government relations, declined to provide details, including on whether or not Griffiths has resigned. As of the time of publication, Griffiths had not responded to confirm or deny reports that he would be leaving Duke at the end of the 2017–2018 academic year.

Heath had written in a March 10 letter to Griffiths that the disciplinary process had been initiated in response to Griffiths’s refusal to meet with her and the dean of the faculty, as well as his “inappropriate behavior in faculty meetings over the past two years.”

The letter also informed Griffiths that he was no longer permitted to attend faculty or committee meetings, except those for students he is advising, and that as long as he refused to meet with administrators he would lose travel and research funds.

Inside *Higher Ed* interviewed Hans-Joerg Tiede, senior program officer for academic freedom, tenure, and governance at the American Association of University Professors. Although the association does not have a role in the Griffiths case, Tiede said it is an administration’s responsibility to prove its case at a hearing before a faculty committee before banning a professor from faculty meetings.

Heath’s statement about the events reads, in part: “We believe that all faculty have a right to speak out as members of a civil academic community, and if all voices are to be heard, diverse perspectives must be valued and protected.” — Celeste Kennel-Shank, the *CHRISTIAN CENTURY*



Anathea Portier-Young



Paul J. Griffiths



Elaine Heath

Indonesian Christian leader jailed under blasphemy law

Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, an Indonesian Protestant whose popularity as a politician in the world’s largest Muslim nation appeared to be a sign of inter-religious tolerance, was convicted of blasphemy and sentenced to two years in jail.

The head judge of the Jakarta court sentenced Purnama on May 9, according to news reports. Last year Purnama, who is appealing the conviction, had accused his political opponents of using a verse of the Qur’an deceptively “to say Muslims should not be led by a non-Muslim,” Reuters reported. “An incorrectly subtitled video of his comments later went viral, helping spark huge demonstrations that ultimately resulted in him being brought to trial.”

Purnama, who is known by his nickname, Ahok, has been governor of the Indonesian capital, Jakarta, and its surrounding region since 2014, leading about 40 million people in the nation of 250 million. He lost the election for another term as governor in April. His current term ends in October.

Philip Jenkins, a professor of history



RALLY FOR A PRISONER: People gather in Jakarta on May 9 to protest the jailing of their governor, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, who is commonly known by his nickname, Ahok. Purnama, a Christian, recently lost the gubernatorial election and was convicted on blasphemy charges.

at Baylor University, who writes the Notes from the Global Church column for the CHRISTIAN CENTURY, wrote last year about Ahok's rise from mining engineer to politician working alongside Muslim leaders, including a stint as a deputy governor to Joko Widodo, who is now Indonesia's president.

In building alliances with the large moderate Muslim groups Nadhlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, Purnama "has been walking a delicate path the whole way," Jenkins said the day after the court's ruling. "They have always been listed as being the great moderate forces. But they had been hearing a lot of discontent within their membership," he said. "And they felt that they couldn't support Ahok."

Disagreements between moderate and hard-line Muslims tapped into fears about secularization, globalization, Western media, the role of women, and other concerns, Jenkins said, noting that it is crucial to clarify that Western categories of moderate and extremist, which focus on violence, do not apply to many Muslims.

"You can be a very, very conservative religious Muslim who is against violence, but you can still be very strict in these legal religious issues," Jenkins said. "NU and Muhammadiyah have worked very

hard against some of the hard-line groups in Indonesia. But once you get into areas of blasphemy and apostasy—they're very conservative."

Muslim moderates can't ignore a charge of blasphemy or appear to be soft on it, he said. Merely being charged with blasphemy can destroy a person's career.

"This is such a tragedy in so many ways," Jenkins said. "What the whole affair comes across to me as is a major warning to moderates in Islam that Indonesia is still a Muslim country and there are limits to how moderate they can feasibly be." —Celeste Kennel-Shank, CHRISTIAN CENTURY

Native Americans press to keep Bears Ears land a national monument

Davis Filfred wishes President Trump would take a page from General "Stormin' Norman" Schwarzkopf's playbook in thinking about Bears Ears National Monument. When Filfred served as a Marine Corps combat engineer in Operation Desert Storm, Schwarzkopf ordered troops not to target religious or archaeological sites for bombing.

Filfred, a member of the Navajo Nation Council representing districts in Utah, wants the Trump administration to take the same approach to Bears Ears, a 1.3-million-acre swath of southern Utah that has become the latest battleground between the federal government and a Native American movement of religion-infused environmental activism.

"This is the place where we worship," he said. "This is our holy ground."

In late April Trump signed an executive order calling for a review of almost two dozen sites designated as national monuments since 1996. The order requires Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke to submit reviews of monuments larger than 100,000 acres within 120 days, with the exception of Bears Ears, for which he was to submit a final review within 45 days. The investigation will center on whether the monuments could be reduced in size or perhaps eliminated.

"What Trump wants to do, and the Utah [congressional] delegation, is they want to bomb our sacred place," Filfred said.

The Bears Ears monument in particular—designated as such by President Obama in December—has become a political lightning rod. Utah's members of Congress have long opposed giving the site a protected status, in part because of the land's potential for resource extraction. They brought the issue to the Trump administration's attention.

The 1906 Antiquities Act gives presidents the power to create national monuments, and Obama created more national monuments than any president besides Franklin Roosevelt, with Bears Ears being one of the largest. No president has ever rescinded a national monument designation—though many have downsized monuments—and it is unclear if Trump has the authority to do so.

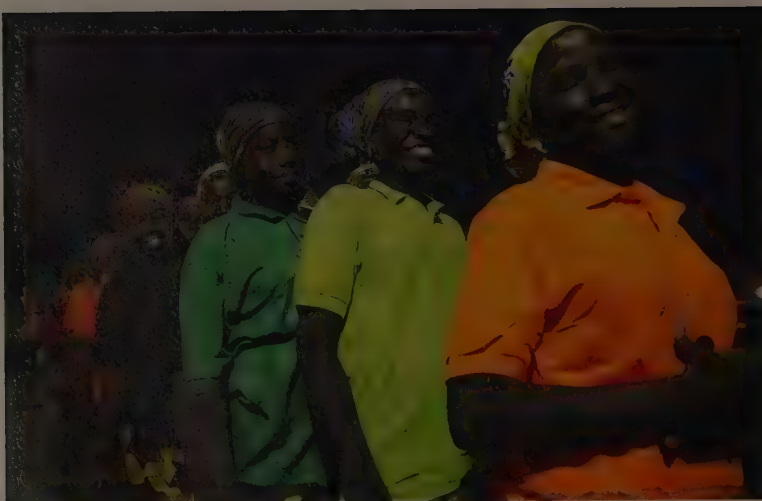
What is clear is that Native Americans are prepared to fight attempts to reduce or eliminate the area's protected status. The designation of Bears Ears as a national monument last year was the culmination of a years-long lobbying effort from five tribes in the region: the Hopi, Navajo, Ute Indian, Ute Mountain Ute, and the Zuni.

The designation was evidence of what academics say has been a steadily increasing awareness of Native American cultural and spiritual life.

Prior to the 1970s, there was "little governmental sensitivity . . . [to] American Indian belief systems and ritual practices," said Peter Nabokov, an anthropologist at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Laws like the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 and the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 "have attempted to secure for them some sort of sense that their belief systems and life ways will be respected," he said. "A lot of [religious] practices were discouraged" or had been prohibited by federal laws, "and for many tribes in some cases they lost things they've never regained."

The protections have resulted in a gradual resurgence of Native American religion and a new breed of environmen-



A group of Chibok schoolgirls recently released from captivity wait to meet with Nigeria's president, Muhammadu Buhari, at the presidential palace in Abuja, Nigeria, on May 7. Five Boko Haram commanders were released in exchange for the freedom of 82 Chibok schoolgirls kidnapped by the extremist group three years ago, a Nigerian government official said. In April 2014, 276 girls were captured; since then some have escaped and others have been freed by government forces or through negotiations. More than 100 girls and young women are still captive. Most of the girls' families are part of the Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria). Many of the girls' parents were killed, according to Rebecca Dali, executive director of a nongovernmental organization working with EYN.

tal action. Spiritual activism encompassing a range of indigenous religions has been developing for years, said Rosalyn LaPier, a member of the Blackfeet Nation.

"Some tribes would say that the entire landscape is saturated with both the natural and the supernatural," said LaPier, a professor of environmental studies at the University of Montana who is currently a visiting professor at Harvard Divinity School. "You have to always take that into consideration when making decisions about changing the landscape."

That worldview, and the conflicts it can create, was on display in the debate over the Dakota Access Pipeline in North Dakota. Thousands of people from hundreds of indigenous groups gathered for months to block the construction of an oil pipeline near the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation. Although the pipeline began transporting oil in mid-May, environmental activism continues.

In Montana, the Northern Cheyenne

people are suing the Trump administration over another executive order that would lift a moratorium on coal leasing on public lands. Coal development in and around the tribe's lands would, among other things, adversely affect the Cheyenne people's "cultural and spiritual practices," according to the complaint.

In the Bears Ears area, people united around the land and the threat they feel from Trump's policies.

"At one time they wouldn't sit down, they never looked at each other, they were enemies," Filfred said. "But now they sit at the table."

Some fear that new policies could undermine the mutual understanding that has been developing between Native Americans and the rest of the country.

Shaun Chapoose, chairman of the Ute Indian Tribe Business Committee, said, "The part of Bears Ears which was unique was it was actually for you and for me to better understand each other." —Henry Gass, *The Christian Science Monitor*

Church closings leave glut of unclaimed pipe organs

A 112-year-old pipe organ in the sanctuary of a now-closed church needs a new home. The \$500,000 instrument is in good condition and free—if you can pay \$10,000 to \$30,000 to remove it from the old West Nashville United Methodist Church and reassemble it.

The 1905 George Kilgen and Son pipe organ is far from unique in needing to be relocated. About 450 other pipe organs are available across the United States, and demand for them is slight, said John Bishop, executive director of the Boston-based Organ Clearing House, which helps save high-quality pipe organs from abandonment or destruction.

"If I have 450 organs listed and I can place 20 a year, I'm doing very well," Bishop said. "It's a shame to see something like a pipe organ, especially a good one in good condition, go without a use. . . . But unless there's somewhere active to put it and real interest in funding it, organs like that very, very frequently wind up in dumpsters."

Whenever a church closes, staff determine which items in the church may be able to fill a need elsewhere, said Amy Hurd, spokeswoman for the Tennessee Conference of the United Methodist Church.

"We have repurposed a lot of things," Hurd said. "Organs are problematic because most of our churches already have an organ, and they're difficult to move."

The West Nashville church closed last year. Dan Cook, who bought the building earlier this year, is converting it into an event venue, and the organ isn't in the plans.

"I don't want to be the guy that sends it to the landfill," Cook said.

The organ has been maintained exceptionally well through the years, said Dennis Milnar, founder of Milnar Organ Company in Nashville, which restored it in 1969 after it had been burned in a fire.

"It's a lovely instrument," Milnar said. "Everything works like a charm." —Holly Meyer, *USA Today*

People

PHOTO COURTESY OF BRIAN DOOLEY



■ In Körmend, a Hungarian town of 12,000 people about 160 miles and two train rides from Budapest, the community has been split by the decision of **Zoltán Németh**, the local Catholic parish priest, to shelter asylum seekers.

The refugee issue is a heated one in Hungary, with Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's government taking an increasingly hostile line against those seeking asylum in the country. In April the Hungarian authorities announced the detention of all asylum seekers, and state news outlets push a steady stream of xenophobic stories.

"It came as a surprise to public opinion that we took people in," said Németh, who lives next to his church, St. Erzsébet's. "The main reason we took them in was because they were in life-threatening danger."

One of the asylum seekers had emailed Németh asking for help. A few months ago he offered space in St. Erzsébet's to asylum seekers from Syria, Iraq, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and elsewhere who were sleeping in tents on the outskirts of the town.

While some parishioners have been supportive, others have criticized him for allowing the dozen or so men to sleep in the church. People have shouted abuse at him on the street. Others have accused him of being a lackey of philanthropist George Soros, targeted by the Orbán government for his funding of various academic, rights-related, and charitable causes in Hungary. Or they've shouted the name of Jacques Hamel at him, referring to the French priest murdered by two ISIS recruits as he was celebrating mass in his Normandy church last year.

However, for some of those who have

interacted with the asylum seekers, such as helping them prepare meals, the experience has helped overcome stereotypes about foreigners, Németh said.

He is encouraged by Pope Francis, who invited a dozen refugees from Syria to the Vatican. Although there had been appeals for Hungarian parishes to accept refugees, "there was really no reaction, no one took them in, and there was no substantive dialogue within the church between bishops and priests," he said. "Politics surrounding refugees in Hungary is not built on acceptance. That is why our followers became divided. Even among priests we can see the divisions."

Németh made his choice after he was asked to help people living in the cold.

"This church doesn't have a bishop at the moment," he said. "And for that reason I came to the decision on my own."

—Brian Dooley, Religion News Service

■ **Theresa F. Latini** has been named the first president of United Lutheran Seminary, with campuses at Gettysburg and Philadelphia.

She begins her tenure July 1, the inauguration of United Lutheran Seminary, a consolidation of two seminaries, both affiliated with the 3.8-million-member Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. ULS's predecessor institutions date back to 1826, making it the ELCA's oldest seminary.

Currently, Latini is an associate dean and professor of practical theology and pastoral care at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan. She previously taught at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. She has worked in conflict mediation with churches throughout the United States.

"This bold and innovative union of two historic Lutheran institutions will enable us to educate and empower public Christian leaders for confessionally rooted, ecumenically connected, and interculturally competent ministry," Latini said in a statement.

She is an ordained minister of Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian

Church (U.S.A.), which is in full communion with the ELCA, sharing a commitment to interchange of clergy and an official recognition of agreement in essential doctrines and sacramental understanding.

The search for a seminary president was launched last fall following the retirement of Gettysburg Seminary president Michael Cooper-White and the conclusion of the term of David Lose, who was president of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia. —United Lutheran Seminary

■ **Martin Doblmeier**, founder of Journey Films, won a Gabriel Award for his documentary *An American Conscience: The Reinhold Niebuhr Story*.

The Gabriel Awards, sponsored by the Catholic Academy for Communications Arts Professionals, honor work in radio, television, new media, and film. *An American Conscience*, which has been airing on PBS stations across the country, won in the category of television documentary.



PHOTO BY HEIDI BAUMGARTNER, CHRISTIAN CENTURY

"The film crackles with energy," Jason Byassee wrote in a review for the *CHRISTIAN CENTURY*. "Like his previous film on Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Doblmeier does a good job showing the arc of a life."

That life was one of a public theologian in the 20th century. Niebuhr wrote works such as *Moral Man and Immoral Society* but is more widely known as the author of the Serenity Prayer, which has been adopted by Alcoholics Anonymous and recovery groups. Niebuhr found fame slightly embarrassing, his daughter, Elisabeth Sifton, says in the documentary.

Others interviewed in the film include former president Jimmy Carter, ethicist Stanley Hauerwas, philosopher Cornel West, and Jewish studies professor Susannah Heschel, who details Niebuhr's close friendship with her father, Abraham Joshua Heschel.

Doblmeier, who specializes in filmmaking about religion, faith, and spirituality, previously made the documentaries *Chaplains*, *The Power of Forgiveness*, and *Bonhoeffer*, among others. —the *CHRISTIAN CENTURY* staff



PHOTO COURTESY OF UNITED LUTHERAN SEMINARY

LIVING The Word

June 25, 12th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Matthew 10:24-39

LAWYER Kenneth Feinberg chaired the September 11 Victim Compensation Fund, which gave money to the family of each person who died in the 2001 terror attacks. Starting with a formula and then using his discretion, Feinberg considered the victims' age, their dependents, whether they had life insurance—and their income and earning potential. The value assigned to these lost lives varied dramatically: as little as \$250,000 for blue-collar workers, as much as \$7.1 million for executives.

Feinberg later reflected on his experience. "As I met with the 9/11 families and wrestled with issues surrounding the valuation of lives lost, I began to question this basic premise of our legal system," he told NPR. "Trained in the law, I had always accepted that no two lives were worth the same in financial terms. But now I found the law in conflict with my growing belief in the equality of all life."

Jesus sends his disciples out into a perilous world. There will be divisions in their families. There will be "those who kill the body." The disciples must be prepared to take up the cross.

And yet, in the middle of this recitation of conflict and danger, Jesus suddenly speaks of the smallest, most insignificant creatures. "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father." In the marketplace, sparrows were the meat of the poor, the ground chuck of the first century. Yet their lives—their deaths—are not beneath God's attention and care.

"Do not be afraid," Jesus says, "you are of more value than many sparrows." In 1905, these lines inspired Canadian schoolteacher Civilla Martin to write the words to "His Eye Is on the Sparrow," a gospel hymn that declares with assurance, "I know he watches me." It's not hard to understand the hymn's later popularity in the African-American church. In a world that insists that black lives do not matter, Jesus declares that overlooked, exploited, brutalized lives are, in fact, of the greatest importance to God. In a world that says the life of a rich person is worth 28 times as much as the life of a working person, Jesus says that God pays special attention to those who are poor, struggling, and suffering. God cares. We are not alone.

Jesus' calculus for the value of a life has little to do with a person's income or earning potential. To Jesus, our lives have innate value, in and of themselves. We have value because we are creatures, like sparrows. And we humans have value because we are made in God's image. As Julian of Norwich

wrote in her vision of the hazelnut, "I marveled how it might last, for it seemed it might suddenly have sunk into nothing because of its littleness. And I was answered in my understanding: 'It lasts and ever shall, because God loves it.'"

To Jesus, our value does not lead to compensation or a guarantee of safety. It means that we receive attention. The God who cares for the welfare of sparrows also keeps track of every aspect of human lives, even tallying up the hairs of our heads. When Paul's description of divine love comes to a crescendo, he promises that one day we will know fully, even as we have been fully known (1 Cor. 13:12). We are already fully known, known more deeply than we even know ourselves.

Occasionally, well-meaning Christians declare that "God doesn't care if you get a tattoo" or "God doesn't care if you have a glass of wine." While it's true that neither choice is, for most of us, a matter of eternal consequence, the idea that God doesn't care is entirely untrue. There is nothing, not even the smallest thing, that is outside the circle of God's care. And if God cares about these little details, the sparrows of our lives, then how much more God cares about the greater shape of each life, and of all our lives in community.

Community, after all, is essential to our value. Jesus speaks to the disciples as a group, using the plural forms of "you." We cannot understand our own value without recognizing that the person next door and the person across the world have the same value. God's care is not for me alone, nor only for people like me, but for all of us.

When we feel secure in God's deep attention, knowledge, and care for us—in other words, when we know that God loves us—then we are able to go forth without fear into a dangerous world. Then we can declare out loud the lessons we've heard whispered in darkened rooms. Then we can stop being afraid of those who wish us harm. When we are assured that our Creator loves us, we can remain steadfast even when our human families turn against us. We can be faithful even when our very lives are at risk. We can pick up our crosses, no matter the cost.

After the September 11 Victim Compensation Fund completed its work, Kenneth Feinberg received a call from the president of Virginia Tech, asking him to manage the fund that would distribute compensation to the families of the students and faculty killed in the 2007 mass shooting. "I realized that Feinberg the citizen should trump Feinberg the lawyer," he said. "My legal training would no longer stand in the way. This time all victims—students and faculty alike—would receive the same compensation."

Sparrows and disciples alike: we know he watches us. To God, we matter. In God's sight, there are no unimportant lives.

Reflections on the lectionary

July 2, 13th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Matthew 10:40-42

FOR DECADES, students in clinical pastoral education have heard the same words before their first day out on the wards. It is part pep talk, part caution. When you enter a hospital room as a chaplain, you are no longer yourself alone. You are representing Christ. Alongside you, behind you, following you into the room, invisibly but truly, is the entire church. You bring God with you. You are yourself, but you stand for more than yourself.

Sending his disciples out on mission, Jesus gives them his own version of that same speech. As his representatives, they now carry an identity beyond their own. When they travel, preach, teach, and heal, it is Christ whose work will be done by their hands. The world will meet Jesus through them: "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me."

When we think about encountering Christ in human form, most often we think of Matthew 25:31-46, in which the Son of Man appears as "the least of these." For those of us who read from a place of comfort, Matthew 25 calls us to see Christ in the other: in those who are hungry and thirsty, lonely and imprisoned, in those who wait in hospital beds for student chaplains. Our task as disciples should be active service, inspired by seeing Jesus in the faces of others in need. We serve him by serving our neighbors.

But Matthew 25 is not the only way that Christ appears in our world. In Matthew 10, Jesus appears not as a person in need but as a disciple empowered to go forth: "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me." Jesus speaks in the second person: he speaks to you, to each of us. Christ is not only visible in the other, in people outside ourselves. We can also see him in us. When we look in the mirror, we will see his face looking back.

It is our privilege and our responsibility to make Christ visible.

But we cannot reflect his face if we stay at home, among those whom we know. Christ is made visible in the act of welcoming, in giving and receiving hospitality. If we never encounter strangers, Jesus has no opportunity to be made manifest in welcome.

I serve as the director of a regional ecumenical agency, where my role includes a ministry of representation. When I show up at annual conventions, ordinations, or Holy Week services, I come as a manifestation of the church universal, the web of relationships in which each congregation is held. At the election of a bishop, I represent not only my own curiosity but also the prayers of the wider church. At an annual meeting, I'm not only a stranger in the pew but a symbol of the mission partnerships that extend beyond a judicatory's bounds.

I try to worship in a congregation of each of our member judicatories at least once a year, in part to increase my knowledge of the traditions that my agency serves. Before accepting this call, I had never been to a Salvation Army worship service or a Byzantine Catholic liturgy; I'd never spent Sunday morning at an African-American Baptist church. I'd never attended a Chrism mass or the enthronement of a Serbian Orthodox bishop. I don't have a good excuse as to why. I suppose I was unsure of the expected etiquette, worried about standing when everyone else was sitting, wary of unfamiliar songs and prayers that everyone else would know by heart. I suppose I was afraid that I would not be welcome.

The opposite is true. This year, on the Wednesday of Holy Week, I went to a small Antiochian Orthodox church for a service of holy unction. I slipped into a pew, a woman in a clerical collar, clearly a stranger. The congregation stood as the small choir chanted, as the visiting bishop proclaimed the gospel, as the priest's preschool-age daughter darted impishly around the sanctuary. We read seven different sets of scripture lessons related to healing and anointing, lighting a candle in a seven-branched candelabrum after each one.

At last the time of the anointing came. The priest explained the rite. Only Orthodox Christians may receive the oil, he said; it is a sacrament, and receiving sacraments implies theological assent. But, he added, his eyes finding mine, if there are any non-Orthodox visitors in the room who would like to come forward, we do have some myrrh and would be glad to anoint you with that.

Gratefully, I joined the line of the faithful, presenting the priest with my open palms. He swapped one oil for the other. "Thank you for coming," he said, as he used a cotton swab to paint tiny crosses on my hands, my wrists, my forehead. The scent lingered as I returned to my pew.

I grieve the divisions in Christ's church. Our petty squabbles and genuine grievances have distracted us from our mission, squandered our resources, broken hearts, and ruined lives. It's a tragedy that we cannot come to one communion table, a shame that our belief in "one holy catholic and apostolic church" remains just an abstract ideal. Our divisions have made us strangers.

But even within this brokenness, there is a deep blessing. Because we are strangers, we can welcome each other. Because we are not yet at home with one another, we can extend hospitality. And in that welcome, Christ can be present in our midst, in the faces of our fellow Christians, as we bear his image to one another. We can bring God with us as we cross the threshold of an unfamiliar church, and we can find God reflected back to us in the welcome we receive there. We can dare to experience the unknown—trusting that alongside us, invisibly but truly, comes Jesus the Christ.

The author is Liddy Barlow, executive minister of Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania.

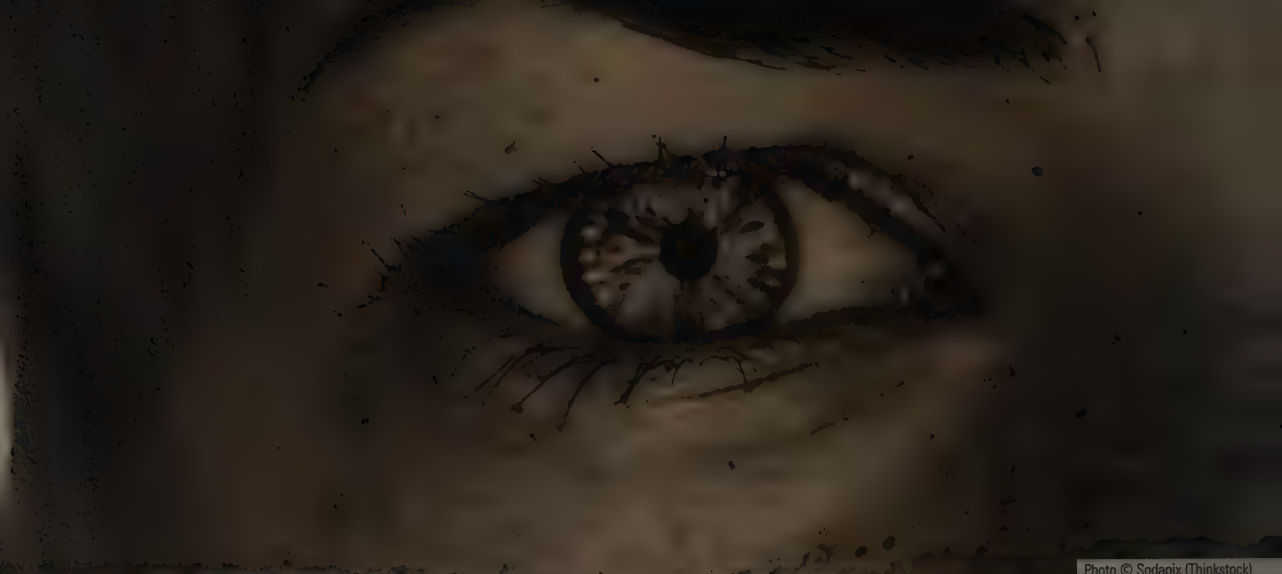


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SURPRISE

On a hot afternoon, I head into church to help with the food bank. I do it with ill grace. Something's awry in my gut, and I'm not sure what. But I don't feel unwell enough not to go, and I remind myself that last time I arrived at the food bank tired but left reinvigorated. The physical work recalibrated my sluggish system. Our guests' needs were basic and imperative, their gratitude warm and unfeigned. Several said no thank you to celery: it might be nice, but someone else could have it, since their teeth—or lack of teeth—were not up to the task. I'm still turning this over in my mind.

Today I need a new celery revelation, but I'm not expecting one. I feel empty and fearful. The congregation is relatively new to me, and walking through the door I'm never sure I'll know the people there. Will I have to explain who I am again? Or will they remember me while I draw a blank on their names?

I arrived at this church rather intuitively, in a frantic search for solace after my husband left me. He was and is a pastor, and I had been happily part of his congregation for nearly 15 years. When the separation happened, I flailed about, trying to discern where to go next. He was there, inside, not saying much, so my place must be outside. The congregation seemed paralyzed. No one told me to leave; I opened the door and saw myself out. I felt rather Hagar-like, squinting in the oppressive desert light: the church the official wife and I the lesser one. To leave a congregation I knew so well and then learn to navigate the complex relationships

within a new place—sometimes this all seemed too much to handle.

I enter the cool basement of the church. As soon as I do, a young girl I have met only once hurls herself toward me, putting her arms around my waist. Last time we served coffee and cookies together, and she is looking forward to working with me again.

At home later, I read an email from a young friend, someone I worry about. We're setting up a coffee date, and because of my strange inner ache, I have been putting her off. She's fine with that but, in the meantime, is there something she can do for me? I feel less like the despairing Hagar than the one who hears God suddenly ask, "What is the matter, Hagar?" while pointing out the well nearby.

I remember being surprised, years ago, when someone—surely my husband—told me that repentance is not explicitly about smartening up, toeing the line, or offering up heaps of shame. Repentance is, first, about turning. Sometimes the turn is started for us, and all we have to do is pivot with it. Undue fear and excess melancholy may not seem like big sins, but I have come to see them as obstacles that can lead us away from God. An embrace from a child I hardly know, a single sentence of grace from an unexpected source—I would have thought that the gap inside me would need a bigger patch. But later that day, when I think to inspect my inner damage, I find the wound still there but the ache nearly faded.

*Sue Sorensen
Winnipeg, Manitoba*

"Lord, catch us off guard today. Surprise us with some moment of beauty or pain so that for at least a moment we may be startled into seeing that you are here in all your splendor, always and everywhere, barely hidden, beneath, beyond, within this life we breathe."

Frederick Buechner, *The Hungering Dark*

Visitors to people who are dying don't usually ask them questions unless they already know the answers. In my work caring for the dying, I learned to do the opposite—and to risk being surprised by the answers.

My favorite question to ask: "When you are here all by yourself, what do you think about?" This gave people permission to talk about what was important to them. Then, of course, I had to formulate a response.

Early one morning I entered a hospice patient's room. The medical director had asked me to visit, sensing some spiritual need that was making the man restless and depressed. I pulled a chair to the bedside, sat down, and introduced myself. He stared at the wall and said nothing. After several minutes I put my hand through the rails of the bed, placed it on top of his hand, and said, "When you are here all by yourself, what do you think about?" His lips began to quiver, and a tear formed at the corner of his eye.

"I killed three men," he said softly.

I don't think I was ever more surprised by a patient's response. I quietly asked, "Would you like to tell me about it?"

He described in detail that moment during World War II when he had killed three young German soldiers. Eventually he asked, "Will God forgive me?" By risking surprise I was able to help this man discover the forgiveness he had been longing for.

William H. Griffith
Columbus, Indiana

When we moved into our Kansas City bungalow 23 years ago, the neighborhood was pretty diverse. We felt good about that. We knew that in the early '70s, it had resisted racist housing practices like redlining and block busting.

Today the neighborhood is even more diverse. It's also adjacent to Troost Avenue, beyond which lie the city's predominantly black areas. My sons have friends whose parents are nervous about letting them drive to our house—we're too close to Troost. You think you know people, and then you see them for who they are.

I'm at a grocery store far from Troost, west of my neighborhood. It's late in the evening, when the store is quiet and easy to navigate. I head into the baking aisle in search of—I can't remember what, because I've wheeled my cart into an explosion.

An African-American woman, dressed in scrubs, is blocking the aisle. She's shouting. Her whole body whipsnaps with her words, her face contorted. Listening is a man with his back to me, his body still. She's not angry at him, I don't think. But he is alert and completely absorbed.

I hesitate. It's hard not to flee the scene of loose anger. I could wheel the cart around and make for the safety of the frozen foods, give her some privacy.

Except she isn't exactly keeping her affairs private. No, I won't let her tantrum run me off. If she wants to have a melt-

The Buechner Narrative Writing Project

Readers are invited to submit first-person narratives (under 1,000 words) on the following topics:

Door

Deadline: July 15, 2017

Indulgence

Deadline: October 15, 2017

Selected essays will be published in the print or web magazine. Authors of the selected essays will receive \$100 and a free one-year subscription to the *CHRISTIAN CENTURY*. Send essays to contest@christiancentury.org.

This series is supported by a grant from the Frederick Buechner Center, which celebrates the work of the essayist, novelist, and pastor.

down in the flour-and-sugar aisle, so be it. I've got shopping to do.

But what if I get swept up in her rage? What if she catches me out of the corner of her eye and says, *Mind your own business, bitch*, what then?

A tiny girl sits wedged in the front of the woman's cart. Her chubby thighs and sandaled feet dangle, but her head is twisted around to study the woman. Her expression is uncertain; she's just on the edge of being frightened.

Suddenly I am angry, too. Who is this out-of-control woman spraying profanity all over the place? She's offensive, no sense of the appropriate time and place. And hey, lady, great example for your daughter. No wonder these kids don't know impulse control. Why are black people always so angry? And where's the manager? Is someone gonna ask her to leave? Then she'll probably threaten to sue, accusing everyone of discrimination.

Then I hear a voice inside me that is not my own. It says, *Stop*. Whoa. What's the matter with me?

I fine-tune my listening, and I realize that the woman is frightened. She's been lied about, accused of something falsely. There is panic beneath her torrential narrative: *I'm not safe*, it says.

I try to soften my expression, smooth out the twists of judgment around my mouth. I stay in the aisle and force myself to remember: powdered sugar, that's what I am after. I maintain

Here we come, world, June 6th, 2015

In her right hand she clutches red and purple wildflowers, her long flaxen hair tumbling from its bun, her slender fingers laced in his burly fingers, trying to knit one understanding between them as they run on a white-sand California beach toward the camera, toward me, who once taught them how metaphor can snag and hold the world.

Now I hold this picture of them leaving their wedding guests behind as they run into their future, past the camera, toward the sun, he in his boutonniere, his dress shoes, the suit he'll wear just once. Her wedding frock, demure, her waist much smaller than my thumb which holds their picture.

The wonder: she is beaming down at her elegant white heels as they kick up the gleaming beach. How difficult to run through sand! How easy they make it look. In spite of all the proofs we know against love, look how they fly in a solar wind of joy, the two of them, a metaphor that's been set free.

Jeanne Murray Walker

a quiet presence out of respect for her need to be heard, even if only overheard by a stranger.

Later, I try to understand my reaction. Why was I angry? Was it the language, the child? Did I suspect that making other shoppers uncomfortable was what the woman wanted?

I hear the voice inside me again: *If she had been white, would you have reacted differently?* You think you know a person; you think you know yourself.

But I'm not a racist. I live in a diverse neighborhood, right by Kansas City's black-white divide.

Teresa Williams
Kansas City, Missouri

I had just finished my weekly preaching duties at my two churches and had returned to the parsonage to relax a bit. A year out of divinity school, I was still getting the hang of the routine and usually needed a little downtime on Sunday afternoon.

The doorbell rang and I answered it. I encountered two men, one who resembled me but 40 years older. "Are you John Patrick?" he inquired. He was John Paul, my grandfather.

I felt the blood drain from my head. I'd been told the story for as long as I could remember. When I was four months old, my mother had me baptized at the local Methodist church, and my biological father's Irish Catholic family turned its back on us. He abandoned us when I was two. There was no child support, no help from the family, nothing. My mother remarried, and my sister and I were legally adopted by our new father. Our last names were changed. The earlier family surname was never spoken in our house.

And now, here was a flesh-and-blood manifestation of the family I had been taught to disavow, standing on my front porch.

I invited him and his brother into my home, where we chatted for a few minutes. He had the air of a gentleman, not the horned demon I had always envisioned. Since I had been assigned to a parish in the village to which his family—and, coincidentally, my adoptive father's family—had immigrated a century before, folks in town had been keeping him apprised of my activities. He said he would like to keep in touch with me, if that was alright. I said it was. He stood and shook my hand.

After he left, I felt a rush of anxiety, as if I had been a disobedient child. I had a thousand conflicting feelings. I called my sister, who exclaimed, "No way! Are you going to tell Mom?" We both realized that we were whispering.

I did eventually tell my mother. It upset her; it made her relive the considerable pain the family had caused her. On the other hand, my adoptive dad was very understanding. In the coming years, Grandfather would invite my wife and me to dinner when he was in town. He even met us once at the Miami airport when we were passing through with our infant daughter.

The happiness engendered by his surprise reentry into my life was tempered when it became clear that my biological father had no desire to have any contact with me. Grandfather apologized. He had tried to reason with him, but to no avail. I had maintained a lifelong fantasy of showing up on my father's

front porch one day, much as Grandfather had appeared on mine. It was devastating to learn that, had I done so, I would have been rebuffed.

Shortly before our son's second birthday, Grandfather sent him a birthday card with a lovely note. The next week, Grandfather died from a stroke. I have had no further contact with that side of the family, aside from a second cousin who found me while doing genealogical research. She has filled in many parts of the family picture for me—even sharing photos of my biological father, who died several years ago, and his subsequent children, none of whom have ever contacted me.

I remain grateful for that unexpected knock on my door. Much to my mother's relief, 37 years later I now resemble her father, not John Paul. But I carry him with me. He cared enough to take a great risk and come to my house and into my life.

*John Patrick Colatch,
Lewisburg, Pennsylvania*

It was an hour's drive from my home in the city to the rural church I was hoping to serve as pastor—if the day's interview went well. I hoped I wouldn't come across as too much of a city slicker.

A woman had kindly offered to meet me a half an hour before the interview for a building tour. I was reassured to see her spiky hair and trendy outfit. I admonished myself for my stereotypes of rural folks.

Inside I got my first introduction to older rural churches' tendency to defy building codes. From a tiny landing, two steep staircases ran up and down. The steps were so narrow that most people's feet would hang over the edge. We toured the upstairs, with its high-ceilinged sanctuary and beautiful stained glass. It was divided from the narthex by a large wooden panel, flanked on either side by 12-foot wooden doors. A step up in the narthex was a new "accessible" washroom.

We went down the two steep staircases to the basement. By this time I needed to use the facilities, and my guide pointed me to a short set of steep stairs to a small mezzanine with two identical, tiny, paneled washrooms. I was careful to follow the notice on the back of the toilet tank: "Make sure toilet stops running or well will run dry."

When I turned and put my hands under the faucet of the little sink, I saw something: a child must have left this rolled-up banana peel over the drain, back before Sunday school let out for the summer. Now it was dried out, with hard black bits and furry brown parts. I reached for a paper towel to remove it.

That's when it moved, and I realized that I had awakened a bat from a snooze.

For a city girl I do well with mice and spiders, but I will always be terrified of bats. My first impulse was to scream, but thankfully I kept that in check. Instead I backed out slowly and went into the other washroom. My hands didn't go under that tap until I was sure nothing was living in the sink.

I didn't tell my tour guide about the bat. I didn't trust myself to sound calm. The interview was a success, and I was called to serve the congregation. One evening each week, I held a drum

circle there in the narthex. Almost every time, the vibrations of our playing brought the bats out of the basement. My phobia was no longer a secret, because people got to watch me duck and shriek as I tried to trap these winged marauders in the sanctuary by shutting those big wooden doors on them. There must be quite a colony in the organ pipes by now.

*Karen Boivin
Ottawa, Ontario*

On Thanksgiving morning of my senior year of high school, there was no turkey in our oven. Dad was out of work. He had been fired as the pastor of a church after reprimanding an elder for inappropriate behavior with a teenage girl at a church function. The board members backed their offended colleague, disbelieving any unseemly intent—and plunging our family of seven into precarious financial waters. Dad's moral valor seemed a paltry substitute for the missing turkey and no pumpkin pie.

After breakfast, I was summoned to the living room. Dad had an idea. Someone had given us a gross of boxes of chocolates, and he wanted me to go door-to-door selling them. If I were diligent, I could sell enough to buy a turkey before the grocery stores closed at noon.

Horried, I told him he should do it himself. He replied that people would respond better to a teenager. I protested that it was inappropriate to solicit on a holiday, but his mind was made up. Caught between his edict and the sure humiliation to come, I put on my coat and headed out into the neighborhood, where I could already smell other people's feasts.

As I headed up the block, the sound of someone hammering reminded me how Dad had swallowed his pride to make ends meet for us. When pastoral employment was slow in coming, he jumped at a chance to learn basic carpentry. He searched secondhand stores for tools, and he fashioned a tool caddy from scrap lumber. The ridicule he received on the job for his motley set of hammers and saws and their crude carrier was an affront to his Scottish pride and ministerial dignity, but he was not deterred.

So I resolved to put on a brave face. I would be my earnest best. Surely people exuding holiday spirit would perceive my awkward situation and respond with generosity. And besides, extra sweets might come in handy once their guests hunkered down in the den to watch football.

Some neighbors were polite. Some were embarrassed for me. Others were outright angry at the violation of the sanctity of their homes on a family holiday. One man, still in his bathrobe, slammed the door without saying a word. No one wanted to buy. After an hour of house-to-house humiliation, I threw in the towel and headed home to face the consequences.

As I rounded the bend of our street, I saw a vision: four heavenly beings in our yard, processing up and down the steps like angels on Jacob's ladder. They were the daughters of our friends, and they were unloading bags from their car. They and their parents had purchased holiday groceries for us, complete with a 20-pound turkey.

Before carving the roasted bird at the table, Dad quieted us down to say grace. As he recited God's blessings, leading up to the miraculous delivery of the Thanksgiving groceries, I wondered if he would include my neighborhood errand. But he didn't. And I don't remember the fate of the unsold chocolates.

Andrew Scrimgeour
Cary, North Carolina

I hit a new low at the end of my penultimate semester of college. I slunk into the office of my gender studies professor and begged for a grade. I wasn't in danger of failing. I needed an A—not an A minus—to keep my 4.0 intact.

Even as I heard the words tumble out of my quivering lips, I knew my perfectionism had pushed me way past the point of reasonableness. There were plenty of warning signs before this—physical symptoms, my parents' concern, weekend nights spent studying while all my dormmates were out doing whatever it is that college students do—but I had convinced myself that all this was simply part of being a serious student. But now I knew; denial was no longer an option.

Unfortunately, the professor gave me the A. My perfect grades would continue to define me until I finally got that first blessed B.

It happened in my first semester of seminary, when I ran

into the brick wall that was my first Walter Brueggemann book. Suddenly my ability merely to keep up was a question mark, and perfection seemed utterly unreachable.

To my surprise, I was the only one who cared about my B. (Actually, my parents cared—they were glad.) The grade came at the same time as I was making my first and best friends at seminary: five highly intelligent women who were full-time students but who also had real jobs and real lives. Grades were not their be-all and end-all. Multiple times each week they forcibly closed my books and pried me off my couch, inviting me to participate in, well, humanity.

I still made good grades, but not always As. And I no longer read every word my professors assigned. I cared about my work, but seminary was teaching me that I'm not loved any less if I'm not constantly striving for perfection. While many people supposedly lose their faith during their theological education, I unexpectedly discovered a new dimension of grace.

Seventeen years later, I am still caught off guard when people love me because of my imperfections, not just in spite of them. When I mess up leading worship, the people in the pews remember that I'm one of them. When I make a bad parenting call, I have the opportunity to teach my son about owning up to our mistakes and extending forgiveness, and I become more trustworthy in the process. A supposed misstep opens the door for strengthened relationship. And in growing closer to one another, we are together moving nearer to God.

So I work hard—not perfectly, but hard—to be authentically imperfect. In some ways it is more risky than trying to be flawless; in other ways it's less so. But when my brokenness and shortcomings meet other people's, knowing and being known becomes a thin space between this life and life eternal.

Laura Stephens-Reed
Northport, Alabama

Compline

—St. Meinrad Archabbey

Forgive me my faults, my faults, my grievous faults,
she recites with the Benedictines preparing
for evening's darkening shroud—

her husband's figure standing erect
in her memory, his finger pointing at her,
threatening her, his once-sure vows

now dead, their hazy specters
prowling the hallways of her heart,
their long fingernails raking its walls.

While she chants—words, just words,
& barely sung—the Lord's Prayer
stumbles onto her tongue: *forgive us our trespasses,*

as we forgive those who trespass against us.
Not even an hour, nor is it sweet,
this prayer that arrests her,

exorcising the ghosts of promises past,
their furious, furious haunting.

Julie L. Moore

I walk in and the patient looks up from the bed. We talk for a while, but it is clear she doesn't really want to talk. I finally offer to bring her a rosary. I will put her on the priest's list for communion this afternoon.

I glance at her room number as I sprint down the hall for a brief lunch with my peer group. It's my first unit of clinical pastoral education, and lunch together is required. But first I stop to call admitting and change my patient's religion to *Catholic* from *None*, the erroneous designation on the census. Now the priest will be sure to stop by her room.

Forty-five minutes later I'm back, with two rosaries for her to choose from.

But something is wrong. It isn't her—it's not the same room. "Excuse me," I say. "I didn't promise to bring you a rosary just now, did I?"

"Certainly not," she says. Silence.

"I'm so sorry," I say. "I'm Mary, the spatially challenged chaplain, just doing my rounds. And rounds and rounds, I guess."

She laughs. "What kind of chaplain are you?"

"Lost," I say, and we both laugh. "We are here to provide spiritual and emotional support. Not directions. Do you have a faith tradition?"

"Greek Orthodox."

"Oh!" I say, eager to rush in, to fix my kerfuffle, to tell her that just a few steps away we have a real, bona fide Greek Orthodox chaplain able and willing to be rushed to the scene.

"But I keep thinking of becoming Catholic."

"Really," I say.

"My husband was Catholic." Long pause. Deep sigh. Does the sigh signal divorce and regret or deceased and sad? No clue.

I punt. "He is . . . gone?"

"Yes," she says. "Last year. He was wonderful. And sometimes I think I would feel closer to him if I was Catholic."

Then she says, "I felt his presence once."

"Really? Tell me."

"We were at his family's place," she says. "We always met there for Christmas. We'd go out caroling in the snow, going door to door and singing, and I went up with the kids because it was still our tradition, you know." The weather was bad, so they stayed in and sang by the fire. "Suddenly I felt this pressure all alongside me," she says. She touches her hip gently and runs her hand up to her shoulder and back down. "All along my hip and my arm."

It's an intimate moment. I am in the room with her love for her husband and the presence—even the pressure—of his love for her.

"So . . ." she says, snapping out of the memory. "I was just telling my girlfriend on the phone that I want to be Catholic, and you walked in. She told me I should call a priest when I go home."

I am getting up to leave but I hesitate at the doorframe, turning back. "You want to know something funny?" I ask.

"Sure," she says.

"If we do nothing, a Catholic priest is already on his way." I explain the census and my message to the priest, mistakenly identifying room 708 as a Catholic who wants communion. "You know, because I mixed up the numbers," I say.

"I don't think you mixed them up," she says quietly.

"Oh geez." I backtrack, not wanting to encourage angelology.

"Could you possibly get me a rosary too?" she asks.

So I pull out the two rosaries stuffed in my pockets. One of which will eventually end up in the hands of its intended recipient, the patient I successfully find later that afternoon.

"You pick one for me," she says, transported.

I hesitate, not sure what territory we are traveling here.

"You pick," I say, trying to sound generous but knowing she will experience this as resistance to the miraculous. She wants an angel. I want her to be in charge of all her choices.

I freeze, my arms outstretched, balancing two rosaries in the palms of my hands.

A nurse walks in without knocking. "Oh honey,

that pink one has you written all over it," the nurse says immediately. My angel beams.

Mary Barnett

New Haven, Connecticut

When I was a young college student in 1953, I spent a night stuck in a train station in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, waiting for my bus connection. The lobby where I waited was totally deserted. I sat down, placed my suitcase between my legs, read for half an hour, and dozed off.

At 3:30 in the morning I awoke to the sound of the door from the street. A young man came in and proceeded to enter every telephone booth in the lobby. "No one left any coins tonight," he said to me, before turning and leaving the way he came in. I attempted to sleep some more.

An hour later he came back—with five other men. They huddled near the door for several minutes, whispering to each other. Then they walked straight toward me and formed a half circle around me. Fearful now, I was aware that I had no avenue of escape. They stood with their arms folded across their chests, facing me in silence. What did they want? Were they waiting for a signal to attack me? I chastised myself for spending the night in this remote lobby, and I prayed for safety.

Gradually, as if by a silent agreement, the men stepped even closer. I knew I had to do something, so I decided to break the silence. I had gone to high school in Harrisburg, so I asked, "Do any of you know the great Henry Carlton, who used to play for William Penn High School?"

They looked startled. Eventually one of them mumbled, "Yeah, I know him."

"I went to school with him," I said. "He was the best high school basketball player I have ever seen."

My comment seemed to disarm them. If my suitcase had made them assume I was an out-of-town traveler, they now knew I had lived in their city and knew one of their people. But they continued to stand there. What were they going to do?

The door opened again. This time a short man walked in as if in a hurry. He was dressed in blue denim clothes, with a baseball cap on his head and a lunch pail in his hand. He walked directly across the lobby to the men standing in front of me. Since I was hidden by them, I am not sure he ever saw me.

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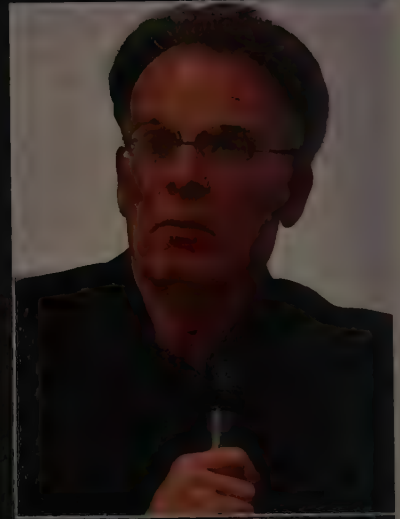
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He reached out and pressed a gospel tract into each of their hands. "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses you from all sin." He said it to them one by one, six times in all, like he was distributing communion. Then he turned and left as hurriedly as he came in.

The men stood there, tracts in hand, looking puzzled. Slowly, without looking at me, they broke ranks and walked out. I was left alone in the lobby.

Was the man a religious fanatic? That night it didn't matter. He was a humble saint through whom I experienced an answer to prayer.

*Ehrhardt Lang
Lompoc, California*

An invitation arrived in our mailbox. My name was on it, and so was my twin sister's. We were ten years old, and our friend Alice was about to be ten, too. "Shhh!" the invitation read. "It's a Surprise Party!"

What's a surprise party? we wondered. Our mother explained. It was a secret. We were not to breathe a word about it to anyone—especially Alice. When we arrived at the party, Alice would not be there. We and the other guests would hide in the living room and await her return. When Alice arrived, we would jump out and yell, "Surprise!" Then the party would begin.

It sounded fun. What could possibly go wrong?

It was a Saturday afternoon, but my sister and I dressed in

our Sunday clothes—matching dresses, white anklets, and patent leather shoes. Our mother combed our hair and adjusted our hairbands. Then she drove us to Alice's house.

We walked to the front door, carrying our gifts. We rang the doorbell—and Alice came to the door.

"Surprise?" we said with hesitation.

"What are you doing here?" Alice asked.

Within seconds our mother and Alice's mother joined us at the front door.

"You're early," Alice's mother said. "The party is tomorrow."

Our mother began to apologize but was interrupted by Alice's mother. I was expecting a reprimand. Instead she said, "Well, come on in," looking right at me. "I've been expecting you, just not quite this early. And don't worry. I was going to tell Alice anyway."

We stepped inside, and while our mothers made small talk over coffee, my sister and I played with Alice.

The following afternoon, we once again donned our Sunday finery and arrived at Alice's house. The party was underway. Alice was all smiles, and so was her mother.

This happened more than 55 years ago, yet still fresh in my memory is the unmerited kindness Alice's mother showed the three bewildered people on her doorstep. I have often reflected on this surprise party gone awry. I see the humor; I feel the embarrassment. But most of all I sense the invitation of God, who is always expecting me.

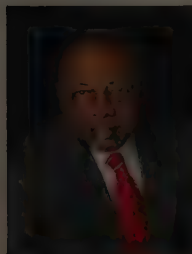
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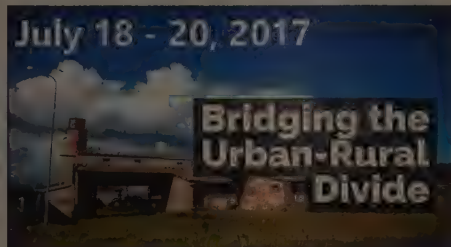


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How St. Patrick evangelized the Irish

The gospel in a violent culture

by Timothy M. Muehlhoff and Richard Langer

ONE MORNING in AD 401, a young man named Patricius was walking along a beach in western Britain with his family when a fleet of Irish longboats rushed ashore. The warriors crashed onto the beach with braying war horns, terrorizing Patricius and his family as they fled toward town. The warriors demolished the village, discovered Patricius in the ruins, and dragged him aboard a boat bound for the east coast of Ireland. He was sold to an Irish warlord named Miliucc and began living like an animal, spending his days in the wild as a shepherd-slave, terrorized by his master.

In his desperation, Patricius found his nominal Christianity slowly taking on a more substantial form. He began to pray many times a day, and he discovered a rising love and faith in God within his heart. He would stay out in the forests and awaken before daylight to pray in the snow and rain, warmed only by the Spirit of God burning in his heart.

After six years of servitude, Patricius heard a mysterious voice assuring him he would soon return to his homeland. Not long thereafter he heard the same voice say, "Come and see, your ship is waiting for you." Answering what he deemed to be the call of God, he fled 200 miles across Ireland to a harbor far in the south, where he boarded a ship to Gaul. Upon arrival, he found his way to a monastery, where he studied to become a priest, and ultimately he returned home to Britain. But after many years of faithful service, he heard another voice crying, "We beg you, holy youth . . . come and walk again among us." Hearing this as a call from God, he rose to answer and served the remainder of his life among the Irish, with whom he had lived as a slave so many years before. Patricius, of course, is better known today as St. Patrick.

It is hard to imagine a time or place that was more opposed to the gospel than fifth-century Ireland. Its economy was built almost entirely on raiding, slavery, and warfare. For several centuries before and after the birth of Christ, the Irish marauded the English coast with relentless zeal. Those who survived their raids were taken captive and sold as slaves. Imagine the horror of serving an Irish war chieftain whose home was protected by a palisade of sharpened tree trunks capped with the heads of slaves who were captured while trying to escape. Indeed, the skulls of victims found many uses, including being sculpted into ceremonial drinking bowls or used as footballs in victory celebrations.

The religious life of Ireland offered no respite from bloodshed. Irish druid paganism was as terrifying as the Irish pirates themselves. Theirs was a bloody religion of human sacrifices,

strangled or beheaded to please the druid gods. Several remarkably well-preserved victims have been found in peat bogs. Vessels with them are adorned with images of gods deriving erotic pleasure from eating humans whole.

In short, the realities Patrick confronted in fifth-century Irish life make the challenges facing most others pale in comparison. Even more remarkable is that despite the opposition, Patrick's efforts were overwhelmingly successful. Within 30 years his small band had converted between 30 and 40 percent of Ireland to Christ. Human sacrifice was eliminated, and slavery and the slave trade were almost entirely abolished.

Monasteries were outposts of God's kingdom.

How did Patrick accomplish such a remarkable transformation in such a short time?

Patrick sought to fulfill his calling to Ireland by building monastic communities. Ian Bradley, a scholar of Celtic Christianity at St. Andrews University, contrasts Celtic monastic life with Egyptian monasticism of the fourth and fifth centuries. Though there are many similarities, a striking difference is that the Egyptian monks generally practiced radical separation from the world, whereas the Celtic monasteries provided places of sanctuary but were also intensely involved in the affairs of the world and the lives of the people they served. George Hunter, who teaches evangelism at Asbury Theological Seminary, makes a similar comparison as he notes that Egyptian monasteries were organized to protest and escape the materialism of Rome and the corruption of the church. The monks built them to cultivate and save their own souls. The Celtic monasteries, in contrast, were organized to save other people's souls. So Patrick's monasteries shared with all monasteries the function of being a place of withdrawal, but they were unique in their simultaneous commitment to engagement.

How did Celtic monastic communities accomplish these seemingly paradoxical purposes? Similar to other monasteries, a Celtic monastery was enclosed by a ditch or wall, but the function of the enclosure was entirely different. Rather than blocking out the world, it served more like the lines on a playing field. As one passed through the gate, one

entered into a playing field with entirely different rules. Within the Celtic monastic enclosure the rules of the kingdom of God applied. The community was an outpost of the kingdom—a foretaste of heaven. What would one day be true in the new heavens and new earth was anticipated and modeled within the walls of the Celtic monastic community.

Monastic activity included all the multitudinous activities of ordinary life. Celtic monasteries were populated with craftsmen, artists, farmers, families, and children. Cows were herded, sheep were sheared, cloth was made, and crops were cultivated. The earth yielded its fruit for the good of human beings and in cooperation with God's design. As Philip Sheldrake aptly phrases it, "monastic settlements [were] anticipations of paradise in which the forces of division, violence and evil were excluded. Wild beasts were tamed and nature was regulated. The privileges of Adam and Eve in Eden, received from God but lost in the Fall, were reclaimed." The enclosures integrated all the elements of human life, as well as all classes of human society.

Patrick's vision of integrating both sacred and secular also found expression in distinctive forms of prayer associated with the daily tasks of living. There were prayers for planting, meals, journeys, and welcoming guests. The echoes of these prayers and practices are found in the old Gaelic prayers repeated in some of the most remote sections of the British Isles into the 20th century. Consider this prayer for lighting a morning fire:

I will kindle my fire this morning
In presence of the holy angels of heaven,
God, kindle Thou in my heart within
A flame of love to my neighbor,
To my foe, to my friend, to my kindred all,
To the brave, to the knave, to the thrall.

The beauty of this prayer comes in no small part from the intimate proximity of daily tasks of ordinary human life and the spiritual mission to love both God and neighbor.

Emphasizing the role of cultural engagement in the Celtic monastery should not make one doubt the importance of spiritual retreat and contemplation. Life within the monasteries was intentionally structured so there was a rhythm of engagement in and withdrawal from the world. Contemplation was not just for the professional ascetics. Patrick and his followers believed that "all people were called from birth to the experience of contemplation," so places were constructed within the enclosure for solitude and contemplation.

The most influential leaders of Patrick's movement often found withdrawal to be essential. Columba alternated periods of intense activity running the monastic community on Iona with months of solitude on the island of Hinba. Cuthbert would withdraw from running the community at Lindisfarne to his hermit cell on the uninhabited Farne Islands. Dyfrig regularly retreated from the busy monastery at Llantwit Major to Caldey Island. These leaders of cultural engagement found their lives unsustainable without seasons of retreat and solitude.

What is most unique about Patrick's mission was its success-

ful transformation of Irish culture. How did he foster such effective engagement? In short, he did it by faithful action at a local level. He was absolutely committed to the conversion of the entirety of Ireland, but his strategy was always expressed by working in local communities.

Patrick returned to Ireland at age 48, which was about the normal life expectancy at that time. He had no idea how long his ministry would last, but from the first moment he returned to Irish soil he was building a work that would continue long after he was gone. He arrived with 12 companions and a simple plan. He would approach a tribal chieftain to seek his con-

Patrick extolled the image of God in all he encountered.

version, or at least permission to form a community of faith adjacent to the tribal settlement. The team would then become involved in the life of the community, engaging them in conversation and acts of service such as mediating disputes and tending the sick. Those who were responsive would join the apostolic band and worship with them. If God blessed the efforts, they would build a church. When the group moved on, Patrick would leave a protégé behind to serve the fledgling church while taking one or two young people to join in planting a new church near another tribal settlement. This simple plan was repeated again and again until an Irish civilization arose, like a phoenix, from the ashes of war, slavery, and human sacrifice.

Patrick's story reminds us that opposition is opportunity. The harsher the oppression, the deeper the wounds and the more desperate the need for the gospel. Patrick landed in an Ireland awash with blood. A peace-filled monastic community was a colony of heaven in a continent of hell. Creating enclaves of human flourishing and divine peace and reconciliation made the most compelling of arguments in favor of the gospel he preached.

One of the observations commonly made by Patrick's biographers is the depth of love he felt for the Irish people and their culture. For all of Irish culture's appalling problems, Patrick was keenly aware of its beauty. He found himself in the midst of loyal, courageous, and generous people—qualities that he could not help extolling when he described the Irish to others. He found people who were deeply in awe of the beauty of nature, and whose posture toward creation served as a ready foundation for Christian worship. Having been a slave himself, he deeply empathized with the plight of the slaves who surrounded him—all too many of whom were Irishmen enslaved by their brethren. Patrick could admire and praise the image of God in all he encountered, no matter how badly it was tarnished.

CC

Timothy M. Muehlhoff teaches communication at Biola University in La Mirada, California. Richard Langer teaches biblical and theological studies at Biola University. This article is excerpted from Winsome Persuasion, © 2017 by Timothy M. Muehlhoff and Richard Langer. Used by permission of InterVarsity Press.

Islam scholar Zeki Saritoprak

Who is Jesus for Muslims?

ZEKİ SARITOPRAK'S BOOK Islam's Jesus examines the role of Jesus in the Qur'an and in Islamic theology. He has written about many Islamic theologians, mystics, and scholars, including the 13th-century poet and Sufi mystic Rumi and the early 20th-century Turkish Muslim scholar Bediüzzaman Said Nursî. A professor of Islamic studies at John Carroll University in University Heights, Ohio, he has been involved in interfaith dialogues, including the Catholic-Muslim dialogues cosponsored by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Islamic Society of North America. His book *Islamic Spirituality: Theology and Practice for the Modern World* will be published in November.

Who is Jesus in Islam?

In Islam, Jesus, peace and blessings be upon him, is one of the five greatest messengers of God who are collectively known as the *'Ul al-Azm* or the Possessors of Steadfastness. Jesus is also a real person who lived in Roman Judea in the first century of the Common Era. Muslims share with Christians most of the basic outlines of Jesus' story, though there are certainly differences. In Islam, as well as in Christianity, Jesus was born to the Virgin Mary and was without a father. But for Muslims, Jesus is neither God nor the Son of God.

Like all messengers of God in Islam, Jesus came to his people with a message. Jesus' message is called the *Injil*, or the gospel. As in the Christian tradition, he is a miracle worker and a healer. He gave sight to the blind and brought the dead back to life. The Qur'an has additional miracles ascribed to Jesus. For example, Jesus speaks from his cradle and makes a bird out of clay and breathes into it to turn it into a real bird.

What is the significance of these additional miracles?

These miracles each occur for a specific purpose. Let's take the example of Jesus speaking from his cradle. After he was born, Mary took the baby Jesus to her people, but they accused her of adultery. They said, "Mary, you have committed a terrible thing." Without speaking, Mary pointed to the baby as if to say, Do not ask me, ask the baby. The people asked how they could speak to a baby; Jesus then started speaking.

According to the Qur'an, Jesus said, "I am indeed the servant of God. He has given me the Book and made me a prophet. He made me blessed wherever I am and advised me of prayer and charity as long as I live. He made me kind to my mother and never made me arrogant or disobedient."

PHOTO COURTESY OF ZEKI SARITOPRAK



Beyond believing Jesus is one of the five elite messengers of God, Muslims believe that Jesus will return to bring justice to the world. Muslim theologians call this "the descent of Jesus" to earth. This eschatological return of Jesus is unique among the prophets of God.

How does Jesus' return figure into Islamic eschatology?

Some say that Jesus will literally and physically descend from the sky and lead a great battle against *ad-Dajjal* or the Antichrist. Others understand this allegorically, which is the approach I prefer and one that I think is more in keeping with

"Muslims believe that Jesus will return to bring justice to the world."

the spirit of the Qur'an and the words of the Prophet of Islam. Some of the most interesting and productive interpretations relate Jesus' coming down to the strengthening of spirituality. I also see this as a sign of alliance between Christians, Muslims, and Jews. But there is a lot of complexity in this area of Islamic theology.

Why is Mary, the mother of Jesus, so important to the Qur'an?

Mary is the only woman mentioned by name in the Qur'an, and chapter 19 is named after her. Her father and mother are mentioned as virtuous people. According to the Qur'an, her mother was a constant worshiper and asked God to give her a son so that she could dedicate him to the temple. God accepted her prayer but did not give her what she wanted. Instead, he gave her Mary, who would be the mother of Jesus.

In Islam, the birth of Jesus is considered miraculous and the only such example in human history. Some Qur'anic verses tell us that God revealed his message to Mary but told her that when her people asked her about her baby she would remain silent. Because of this divine revelation, some Muslim theo-

gians consider her a prophet of God. The Prophet of Islam describes her as the highest woman in paradise, literally the master of the women of paradise.

What is the meaning of *Messiah* in Islam?

Interestingly, out of all prophets and messengers of God, Jesus is the only messenger who received the title of *al-Masih*, or Messiah, in the Qur'an. The term can be translated as the Anointed One. The root of the word has something to do with touching; *mash* means to touch. This is related to Jesus' touching when he would heal people afflicted with various diseases. *Al-Masih* also refers to the eschatological purpose of Jesus, his coming at the end of time. But much of the discussion of Jesus' eschatological purpose is found in the Hadith literature and not in the Qur'an itself.

Why is it important for Christians to understand who Jesus is in Islam?

By understanding who Jesus is in Islam, Christians might find common ground with Muslims. The similarities of Jesus in Islam and in Christianity—for instance, Jesus' miracles and his birth to the Virgin Mary—may be of more importance than what divides Christians and Muslims.

In your book you say that in Islam the “comforter” of John 14:16—who Christians understand to be the Holy Spirit—is

interpreted to be Muhammad. Is there a place for the Holy Spirit in Islam? How is God's continuous presence known?

The Holy Spirit is mentioned several times in the Qur'an. The second chapter of the Qur'an, for example, says that God supported Jesus with the Holy Spirit. Muslim commentators are split on the meaning of Holy Spirit. Some have said that it refers to the angel Gabriel. A group of early Muslim scholars thought that when the Qur'an refers to the Holy Spirit, it means the gospel. In this reading, God supported Jesus with the power of the gospel. Thus the Qur'an and the gospel are “*ruh Allah*” or the spirit of God.

Another group of early scholars understood it as the greatest divine name through which Jesus was able to bring the dead to life. Other interpretations have said it is “the pure spirit of God,” while still others have said that it is a feeling of the presence of God. The difference of opinion on the topic attests to its importance as one of the most powerful concepts in the Qur'an.

How does interfaith dialogue continue after one party says, “Jesus was not divine” and the other says, “Jesus was divine”? Or when Christians say that Jesus' death is central to their understanding of the faith and Muslims say that Jesus did not die?

Differences should be occasions for, not obstacles to, dialogue. Different interpretations of the same events and figures can be found within all religions.

Once after I gave a talk on the subject of Jesus in Islam a gen-

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tleman in the audience asked what Muslims' response would be to Jesus saying that he is the Son of God. Theologically speaking, according to Islam, Jesus always speaks the truth. The problem is not about what Jesus said, but about our understanding of what Jesus said. Do we understand Jesus correctly?

Muslim theologians will first look for verification of the statement and then at the words Jesus used in their original form or language. The common ground with Christians is the belief that Jesus always speaks the truth. Even if we cannot solve all of our theological differences in this way, we can get to know each other better and find ways we can cooperate and areas where we do agree. In the end, we find that we are not as different as we thought we were.

What was the Prophet Muhammad's relationship to Christianity before his visit from the angel?

The Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessing be upon him, was born in Mecca, in what is today Saudi Arabia. Although Mecca was a trading center, we do not know if there was an established Christian community there at the time. Most people were polytheists, with the exception of a few who had converted to Christianity, such as the Prophet's wife's nephew, Waraqa ibn Nawfal, with whom the Prophet shared his first experience of revelation, when the angel Gabriel appeared to him with the command "Read."

Unlike many of the people of Mecca, the Prophet never

worshiped idols, and it is believed that he followed the remnants of the religion of Abraham before he received the revelation. Some sources say that when he traveled to Syria as a child, he met a monk named Bahira. According to these sources, Bahira was an Arab Arian or perhaps Gnostic who saw that a cloud was following the Meccan caravan to provide protection from the heat. Bahira wanted to offer the travelers a meal. Most of the people in the caravan went to the meal, but they asked Muhammad to stay with the caravan. Bahira realized that the cloud stayed with the caravan. He asked if anyone had stayed behind, and the people said that a boy had been left. He asked them to bring the boy, and he realized that the cloud was following Muhammad. He foresaw that the boy would be a great man; he told the Prophet's uncle, Abu Talib, to protect this boy.

Has your experience in interfaith dialogue changed you?

Before coming to the United States, I was teaching in an area of Turkey known as the birthplace of Abraham. In my college years, I majored in Islamic theology and law. My attention was drawn to the Qur'anic concept of *Ahl al-Kitab* or the People of the Book. My understanding of this concept was mostly theoretical. I understood the Qur'anic approach to be that God preferred the People of the Book over people who do not believe in God. In school, we often talked about how Muslims should side with America instead of the USSR, because Americans are People of the Book. But I never had a deep relationship with anyone who was either Jewish or Christian.

In the United States I began to work with Jews and Christians who shared many of the same qualities of goodness that I understood from Islam. In fact, in Islam people are good people not because of one's nominal faith, but because of the quality of the person. There is a saying of the Prophet: God does not look at your appearance, but instead looks at your heart. So if you have a Christian who is kind and honest and a Muslim who is not, you can say, even from an Islamic perspective, that the Christian is qualitatively a better Muslim than the Muslim. For me, the idea of the People of the Book is critical because I think that we all share many good qualities that can bring us closer together as individuals and as a community.

What extra-Qur'anic sources are most influential for you in your faith?

The Qur'an is the primary source of Islam. Then there are the sayings of the Prophet, known as the Hadith. Scholars of Islam, with various skills and purposes, have interpreted these sources, and Islamic law, theology, spirituality, and so on have developed as a result. Islamic scholars have reached the apex of their knowledge while studying and commenting on these sources.

If I had to choose which of these scholars have been most influential to me, I would have to choose al-Ghazali from the classical era and Said Nursi from the modern era. I find both of them remarkably open-minded, inspiring, tolerant, occasionally critical of divergent views, but at the same time compassionate.

—Amy Frykholm

They still produce fruit

Even in old age they still produce fruit
these holy souls reaching beyond
the lapses and losses of the body.

In the bountiful boughs and leaves
of threefold-rooted olive trees,
palms and cedars, they find

the legacy from the creator
to his creation, freedom
from the bondage of desiccated time.

An old woman wrinkled with years
has eyes as lustrous as Aegean coral
holding the hope of rapture.

The minister's collar outgrows his voice
yet he still harvests fulsome sounds
playing the pipe organ proclaiming Christ.

These souls flourish in this world
until they are crowned and leave
in a rush of green one night.

Philip C. Kolin

by Stephanie Paulsell

When the market is God

EARLIER THIS SPRING David Dao was dragged off a United Airlines flight by aviation police in Chicago. When he refused to deplane and wait for a later flight, the police hauled him from his seat and dragged him down the aisle, breaking his nose and leaving him bloody and concussed. The police had sworn to serve and protect, but the person they protected was the corporation that owned the plane, not the human being who had paid that corporation to fly him home.

This incident is an example of the problem Harvey Cox analyzes in his new book, *The Market as God*. Cox argues that our sacralized market endows corporations with personhood, granting them immunity from double jeopardy, giving them the right to a trial by jury, and allowing their unlimited contributions to political campaigns in the name of protecting their freedom of speech.

With the power to remake itself over time, this new corporate person has attained something that even Adam and Eve did not enjoy: immortality. And, as in the case of Union Carbide, which became part of Dow Chemical after the 1984 disaster in Bhopal, India, this immortal corporate person has been granted another quality that Adam and Eve lacked: blamelessness.

This understanding of personhood is only possible, Cox argues, when the market stops functioning as the servant of society and becomes its master. The deployment of state power to drag people from airplanes is not the worst thing that can happen in such a market; the worst thing is that we forget, as Cox puts it, “how unjust and humiliating it is to take from people the resources they need to live, and to exact personal gain from their misery.” The worst thing is that income inequality continues to grow unchecked until society simply breaks apart.

Cox borrows the image of a deified, sacralized market from Pope Francis, who critiqued those who defend trickle-down economic theories as “a crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power and in the sacralized workings of the prevailing economic system.” A “deified market,” the pope insisted, has created “a globalization of indifference.”

Reading economic theory and business news through a theological lens, Cox found that the market has its myths of origin, legends of the fall, and doctrines of sin and redemption. It has priests and rituals, saints and prophets, liturgies, a sacred calendar, and sacred spaces. It has cultivated forms of evangelization and esoteric debates about the nature of personhood and its own infallibility.

In other words, the deified market looks like a religion. But, unlike most religions, it fails to acknowledge the contingencies and paradoxes of human existence. It lacks the ability of reli-

gious faith to knit the known and the unknown, as Thomas Merton once put it, into a living whole. In a deified market, the tragedy of 9/11 spurred the president not to invite us to consider the implications of our shared humanity or the substance of our citizenship, but to urge us to get out and shop.

In *The Market as God*, Cox charts “the long struggle . . . between the God of the Bible who has a bias for the poor, and the God of The Market.” The market has by and large been victorious, he argues, although he also traces movements within religion that have tried to restore the market to its rightful place—from Catholic social teachings to Protestant social gospel, from Europe’s religious socialism and worker priests to Latin America’s liberation theology.

Cox’s book flows from this genealogy. He imagines a restoration of the market that’s grounded in the first creation story of the book of Genesis. Following the structure of the seven days of creation, Cox proposes a seven-step plan for a decentralization

The market has its own myths, rituals, and sacred spaces.

of the market. Citing the work of Israeli scholar Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, he reads the first creation story as an account of God moving from a centralized, all-encompassing presence to the multiplicity of light and darkness, dry land and oceans, sea monsters, green plants, and stars. Human beings add to that vibrant multiplicity; we are made in God’s image and share in God’s life.

Cox imagines that, with the right kind of encouragement, the market might choose a decentralization that would set loose human creativity to address the problems that the deification of the market has created. Rather than concentrating power and wealth at the top of corporations, there would be more democratic participation throughout the system. Human ingenuity would be focused more on human dignity and less on the personhood of corporations.

For Cox this is not a utopian dream but rather an absolute necessity. Even a deified market cannot grow forever, and the God of the market is no protection against the catastrophe of ever-widening income inequality. Cox’s book challenges us to question this force, resist its deification, and join with others in imagining it as a means rather than an end.

Stephanie Paulsell teaches at Harvard Divinity School.

IN Review

The Till family's agony

by Debra Bendis

When Emmett Till, a 14-year-old black boy from Chicago, was murdered for allegedly whistling at and touching a white woman in the Mississippi Delta in 1955, his story became a cornerstone of the civil rights movement. This was due in great part to his mother, Mamie Elizabeth Till-Mobley, who insisted that his hideously mutilated body be put in an open casket for all to see. According to the *Chicago Tribune*, more than 40,000 persons viewed the body.

In 2004, Till-Mobley's book about her son's murder, *Death of Innocence*, was published. A dozen others followed. Just last year, for example, Devery S. Anderson published *Emmett Till: The Murder That Shocked the World and Propelled the Civil Rights Movement*, which is now being turned into an HBO miniseries produced by Jay Z and Will Smith.

Timothy Tyson's *The Blood of Emmett Till* has been launched into the national spotlight for its revelation that the woman who accused Till of harassing her, Carolyn Bryant, admitted in an interview with the author that she had been lying.

This detail is a compelling reason to read Tyson's work, but it's not the only one. Tyson is the author of *Blood Done Sign My Name: A True Story*, a book that began with his memory of being ten years old in Oxford, North Carolina, when a black man was brutally murdered and his murderers acquitted. (A movie version of Tyson's account appeared in 2010.) In taking on another account of racial violence and another unjust trial, one that's "the most notorious racial incident in the world," Tyson hoped to offer a carefully researched version

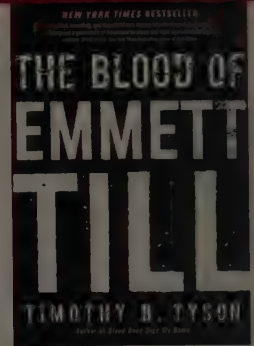
based on historically sound accounts. He has done that.

Tyson includes new research, yet manages to shape it all into a strong and readable narrative. At times, the amount of data and names feels exhausting, but the book will be valued for that—a trusted account and thorough resource. Tyson names those who were present at the trial, their background, and their extended families. He travels north to talk about Till's family, then returns to report on the impact of Till's death. He shows how news of the death exploded through the northern media and into already volatile black Chicago communities.

In the movement in Mississippi against segregation, three people played particularly significant roles: World War II veteran Amzie Moore, president of a Mississippi branch of the NAACP; Medgar Evers, field secretary for the NAACP; and Theodore Howard, head of surgery at Mound Bayou's Taborian Hospital. In 1951, these three men founded what quickly became known as the Regional Council of Negro Leadership.

The number of local, regional, and state protests exploded. Says Tyson, "something new was afoot. In cities all across America citizens found Mississippi guilty as charged." As Till's death and the subsequent trial were shaping and accelerating a national civil rights movement, the negative attention cast a stinging blow to Mississippi, where it stimulated increased hatred, political and economic oppression, and ramped-up violence.

Granted, much of Mississippi's segregationist momentum had picked up in 1954 with the *Brown v. Board of*



The Blood of Emmett Till

By Timothy B. Tyson

Simon & Schuster, 304 pp., \$27.00

Education decision. (Till's death came a year later.) Citizens' Councils began to form regionally, spurred by the rhetoric of Thomas P. Brady, Mississippi's infamous circuit court judge. Brady played on fears of integration by calling the doctrine of equality between the races "the reasoning which produces riots, raping and revolutions." Southern writer Lillian Smith called the councils "a quiet, well-bred mob."

The publisher touts Tyson's book for including "the only interview ever given by Carolyn Bryant," the white woman to whom Till supposedly made verbal and physical advances, and whose husband helped murder Till. In Tyson's 2007 interview with then 72-year-old Bryant, she admitted that her testimony that Till had grabbed her around the waist and muttered obscenities was "not true."

Unfortunately, Tyson did not think to tell members of the Till family about Bryant's change in testimony. They didn't hear the news until the book came out ten years later. In an interview with journalist Brandis Friedman at WTTW in Chicago, Till's cousin Airikca Gordon said, "What really angered me was that, this man, Timothy Tyson, received this confession of sorts ten years ago, and he had just now released it . . . it could have been very essential to the reopening of the case at the time he received the information. It could have helped our family with our plight to get justice for Emmett." Actually, reports Friedman,

although the statute of limitations for perjury has run out, the interview has led the Justice Department to consider reopening the case.

Tyson says he regrets not telling the family sooner. In a statement shared with WTTW, he explains that he “did not bother Emmett Till’s family for interviews” because they had been interviewed so many times before. “I saw no reason to make them repeat these stories. . . . I see that they feel otherwise, and that in itself makes me regret that I did not contact them, but from a scholarly standpoint I felt that I had all that I needed.”

Historical scholarship, Tyson contends, is different from the popular press:

To me, this was not anything like the morning news. Did anyone with any relationship to or familiarity with this story actually believe that Carolyn Bryant told the truth in court? I did not consider this a big revelation. . . . My burden of responsibility to this crucial American story was to comb through the massive pile of evidence and try to find the truth as best I could.

Another relative, Ollie Gordon, was a child when Till was murdered. When she heard about Tyson’s book, the pain of the 1955 events was reactivated:

Each time a book comes out or the story of a movie comes out, wounds are reopened in our family. Subconscious grief comes back. . . . Emmett’s mother was in Chicago, and I was in that house, and I grew up in that house. I don’t think a day went by that she didn’t cry.

The ongoing agony for the Till family is the result of violent injustice: a child was stolen from those who loved him. Because Emmett became public property—a symbol of injustice, the impetus for a necessary but unending movement against racist hatred—he is stolen again from his family with every update on the case and every new book about it. Neither the power of the story nor the good it’s done alleviates the tragedy of a life cut short.

The Song Poet: A Memoir of My Father

By Kao Kalia Yang
Picador, 288 pp., \$17.00 paperback

Author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie wrote, “Nobody is ever just a refugee. Nobody is ever just a single thing.” Yet, it can be hard to uncover the humanity behind refugee narratives. Refugee stories are often written with the help of a translator or ghostwriter and, in the process of translation, they develop a quality of sameness.

Enter Kao Kalia Yang, among the most lyrical and eloquent memoirists of her generation. Unlike refugee memoirs that clunk along in the words of a second language or a ghostwriter, Yang’s stories reveal the intimacy of family with the literary skill of an MFA graduate. (She has a degree in creative nonfiction from Columbia.)

Yang’s family is Hmong, an ethnic minority group in Vietnam, China, Thailand, and Laos. During the U.S. military’s secret intervention in Laos, the Hmong people sided with the Americans. They were subsequently targeted by the Laotian government, and many were forced to flee into Thailand. Yang’s family left the mountains of Laos in the 1970s. When the Thai government started closing its refugee camps, many Hmong people were resettled, and Yang’s family landed in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Yang, who was born in a refugee camp in Thailand and resettled with her family at age six, became a cultural and linguistic bridge for her parents as they navigated life in America. Her first memoir, *The Latecomer*, which won the 2009 Minnesota Book Award, centers on her grandmother’s stories, which shaped Yang’s childhood. *The Song Poet*, winner of the 2017 Minnesota Book Award, is a tribute to her father, Bee Yang, whose “poetry shields us from the poverty of our lives.”

The book covers a wide swath of Bee’s life, from his birth in a hut in the mountains of Laos to his struggles parenting a teenage son who encounters racism in suburban Minnesota. As a fatherless boy in a Hmong village, Bee

gathers the words of his neighbors and recites strands of oral narrative from memory. Through song and poetry he learns to share “stories of hurt and sorrow, of missing and despair, of anger and betrayal.” But he loses his ability to sing poetry after his mother dies in America many years later, his heart broken with her loss.

Structured as an album with Side A (in Bee’s voice) and Side B (in Yang’s voice), the memoir easily moves between perspectives and across time. In the introductory “Album Notes,” Yang reflects on her father’s performance one year at the Hmong American New Year celebration in St. Paul. Her account tells a universal story: a child’s blind adoration falls away to recognition of her parents as people with complexities and flaws. In telling human stories with nuance and detail, Yang deftly extends the genre beyond the “noble refugee” trope: it paints a relatable portrait that doesn’t allow the reader to write off the experience as too “other.”

Yang tells her father’s story with the same kind of lyricism that he demonstrated in his song poetry. “Love Song”—which covers her parents’ relationship, from their introduction in the jungle as they fled the Laotian soldiers to their years of working menial jobs in America—is structured like a song. “I loved you when. . . .” each paragraph begins.

I loved you late at night when the sound of the crickets grew fierce and unafraid, and we could hear the scurrying of mice along the floor, but your head was on my shoulder, your hand was on my heart, and the smell of your green Parrot soap wafted up to my nose and invited me to play in a garden of fresh flowers lush with rain, to swim in streams warmed by the day’s hot sun.

In “Cry of Machines,” Bee wrestles with the moral sacrifices he has made to ensure his children’s survival: first, as a drug runner for Thai soldiers in the refugee camp, and later as a machinist enduring verbal abuse and inhaling

Reviewed by Stina Kielsmeier-Cook, who lives and writes in Minneapolis.

PUT THE **CENTURY** INTO TOMORROW'S LANDSCAPE

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hard metal particle dust in a Minnesota factory.

Like many newcomers to America, Bee channels his struggles into hope for a better life for his children. Yang and her siblings feel the weight of their parents' expectations: "Doctors and Lawyers" reveals the family strain that occurs when children outpace their parents' education.

"Return to Laos (Duet)" describes how Bee travels back to Laos to see the land he'd left decades earlier, only to be denied entry. He is so close to return: he literally stands on the earth in Laos. But the border officer remarks: "We forced you out of our country once, do you want us to do it again?"

Yang's stories stretch us past our instincts to shield ourselves from the pain of others. We cry as Bee's two-year-old cousin is shot while tied to his father's back as he runs through the jungle, and we witness Bee's uncle being captured and tortured when he refuses to abandon his dying son. We experience Bee's guilt as he leaves his uncle behind to cross the Mekong river into safety. We gasp when we read Yang's description of her great-uncle's mental deterioration: "What happened in Laos has happened inside of him. Like the country, he is now a collection of open pits, broken trees, and burnt houses."

It's in such vulnerability that we receive Yang's greatest gifts to her readers: a window into an otherwise unfathomable refugee story, a daughter speaking her father's voice in a language he will never master, a poetry that would otherwise be lost completely.

The Witness of Religion in an Age of Fear

By Michael Kinnamon
Westminster John Knox, 120 pp.,
\$16.00 paperback

Here's a small book that deftly deals with large truth. Ecumenist and seminary dean Michael Kinnamon has succeeded in writing a concise, readable book that shows that fear, "when it becomes excessive or misdirected, is itself dangerous." The stated purpose of the book: "to move all of us to action."

Kinnamon says that Americans live in an age of fear. Through millions of years of adaptation, humans are beneficially hardwired to survive with the help of neurological mechanisms of fear. However, in the present age, fears have gotten out of hand. Otherwise normal, essential fearfulness has ballooned out of proportion. It's the nature of fear to take over our limbic systems, to force us into quick, defensive response. As fear takes over the human brain, it impairs our capacity to assess the magnitude of the threat, weigh alternatives, and make good decisions. As Martin Luther King Jr. said, "Normal fear protects us; abnormal fear paralyzes us."

In the present moment our fearfulness is whipped up by fearmongers like Donald Trump and the NRA's Wayne LaPierre for their political and financial

Reviewed by William Willimon, whose most recent book is Who Lynched Willie Earle? Preaching to Confront Racism (Abingdon).

LAURA EVERETT

holy spokes



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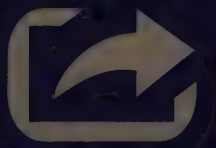
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Faith Matters

M. Craig Barnes

(pictured with his wife, Dawne)

"I've been working on a writing project about *gravitas*, which describes a soul that's weighty enough to attract others. Most of us know people who have a gravitational pull on our lives. We go to them when we're confused, hurt, or spiritually dry. They aren't therapists or even spiritual directors. They may not be leaders, but we don't trust leaders without *gravitas*.

Most people with these weighty souls are scarred up a bit, and that's part of what makes them attractive. But I'm trying to figure out how *gravitas* is developed beyond being wounded by life.

Can a 25-year-old pastor find it just by taking the inherited theological tradition to heart? Can it be found from the land or the community to which one is devoted? What is the role of failure, sin, and regret? And in the end, is *gravitas* a holy gift or an achievement?"

Read Craig's essays in **THE Christian**
CENTURY

gain. Many of our overwhelming fears (like death by terrorists) make little sense when compared with the actual threats that we face (from smoking and auto accidents). People my age are most fearful of being victims of crime, though we are the least likely to be harmed by a criminal. Americans are more fearful than people in nations where the chances of violent death or a short life are higher than here.

Kinnamon deftly notes and dismisses excessive, misplaced fears. He marshals some great citations to show how our irrational fear does damage to our society as we hunker down behind alarm systems, expend huge resources for bogus security, and cower in gated communities. His depiction of the tragedy of Israeli fear and its sad results is especially poignant.

What's to be done about our excessive, thoughtless, paralyzing fears and the collective panic attack that grips America? Kinnamon advocates "the witness of religion" as an antidote to the damage we are doing to ourselves in this age of fear. "Religions, at their best, have not only a word of comfort for those who are afraid, but a word of challenge for those who manipulate fear to their own advantage or who succumb to such manipulation."

After offering valid warnings on the dangers of excessive fear, Kinnamon shifts toward arguing for religion as an essential, though often overlooked, foe of fear. I found this last third of the book disappointing. Kinnamon fails to demonstrate that religion is fear's worthy adversary. Asserting that all major religions "warn about the dangers of excessive fear," he calls up texts from Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Hinduism that "teach ways of overcoming fear." But he offers a largely decontextualized cherry-picking of these sacred texts. Though it's interesting to know that many of the world's religions disapprove of fear, it's also reasonable to suppose that various faiths criticize fearfulness for a variety of vastly different reasons.

Kinnamon has a tantalizing discussion of fear among Jews and Christians, and he quotes Aquinas to good effect. But I wish he had said more about Jesus' curious call

not to fear him but rather to cultivate fear of worldly lures and temptation. (When a person reacted to one of my recent sermons with, "Your fear of the Trump administration is mean-spirited and unjustified. You have nothing to fear from our new president," I suspect Jesus would have approved the terror with which I reacted to the comment.)

I can't speak for any faiths other than Christianity, but I think that faith faces fear with more than moral exhortation and sweeping dismissals of excessive, misplaced fear. Christians are bold to believe that we face fear with Christ. The one who commanded repeatedly, "Fear not!" was not only a wise teacher, he was the Son of God. Christ helps us accomplish what he commands. If my fear response is deep within me, an all-too-human, natural inclination that jerks me around despite my best efforts to curb it, then moralistic exhortations to suppress my fears are ineffective.

Kinnamon's essentially nonchristological response to fear fits nontheistic Buddhism better than those faiths that believe in a God who is greater even than our fears. Through the ages, countless Christians suffered persecution and took risks—not because they believed that fear hindered full human flourishing, but because they had their eyes fixed on a reality other than that established through human fearfulness.

Kinnamon uses the Israel-Palestine conflict as a case study for his assertions that fear can be tempered by religion, but he does so brashly. The fears that many Israelis and Palestinians have for one another may paralyze their consciences and lead to bad consequences, but I would be hard-pressed to tell either party that their fear is unreasonable and can be healed through a moralistic version of religion. Kinnamon approvingly quotes Martin Luther King's dictum, "People fail to get along because they fear each other; they fear each other because they don't know each other." True. But quoted in the context of a conflict so great as that between Israel and Palestine, it borders on sentimentality. My religion suggests to me that if these two peoples are to move beyond such deep fear and suffering, the move must be miraculously (that is, divinely) initiated.

The book concludes with ten guidelines for churches that want to address the issue of excessive fear. This section will be most helpful to clergy and congregations, and it's where the book might achieve Kinnamon's goal of moving us to action. The tenth rule is for "people of religious faith" to "lift up the real basis for hope." If we are to find such hope, we'll need to move past vague notions of faith and grasp onto the God who, through Christ, is an active ally in defeating our fears and righting our wrongs.

Bresson on Bresson: Interviews 1943–1983

By Robert Bresson, edited by Mylène Bresson, translated from the French by Anna Moschovakis
New York Review Books, 288 pp., \$24.95

This collection of interviews with the great French filmmaker Robert Bresson contains much for anyone interested in film or faith. Bresson, who died in 1999 at the age of 98, was one of the most important (if not most influential) directors of the last century. Born, raised, and educated a nominal Catholic near Paris, he began his career as a painter and photographer, immersed in the arts scene. During World War II, he spent a year in a Nazi prisoner-of-war camp. After the war, he turned to making films.

Bresson became famous for his techniques. While filming his first picture, he noticed that the actors he'd cast "suddenly ceased to be people" while acting. Henceforward, he hired men and women "who didn't act"—who were amateurs, or, as he preferred to call them, "models." He wanted them to know almost nothing about a film before shooting began, and once it began he wanted them to remain themselves rather than attempt to embody a character.

Bresson's films revolved around sin, shame, passion, and redemption. These themes were embodied in characters that included a depressed provincial pastor,

Reviewed by Jon M. Sweeney, whose most recent book is The Saint vs. the Scholar: The Fight between Faith and Reason.

taken from a Georges Bernanos novel, the misunderstood saint Joan of Arc, and a man struggling against evil, pulled from a short story by Tolstoy. *Balthazar*, at *Random* (1966) tells the story of a donkey, as inspired by Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*. (You can watch the amazing two and a half minute final scene online.)

Despite critical accolades and a devoted if small following, Bresson experienced persistent difficulty when seeking funding for new projects. (Imagine those pitch meetings!) He was always consciously trying to make cinema an art form.

When I first watched *The Angels of Sin* (1943), *Diary of a Country Priest* (1951), and *The Trial of Joan of Arc* (1962), I remember being arrested by the close-ups of concentrating, unadorned faces. Recently I loaned my copy of *The Trial of Joan of Arc* to an atheist friend who, when she returned it a week later, said that she'd wept while watching it. Bresson's spare, honest approach elicits raw emotions. "It's the knots that tie and unravel inside the characters that give a film its movement," he said in a 1946 interview. He developed characters from the inside out.

Bresson downplayed the role of a script, preferring to improvise while filming. He was, after all (and as he often reminded interviewers), a painter first and foremost, not a writer. He also downplayed the purpose of a soundtrack in order to focus instead on what he called "the music of daily life."

Most of all, he sought to draw out interiority—which isn't easy to do on film. On choosing Bernanos's novel *Diary of a Country Priest* for adaptation, he said,

What drew me to this book above anything else was the interiority of the plot and dramatic threads. . . . I

believe that the action in film must become—will become—more and more interior. . . . [W]hat we have understood so far as . . . the kind of motion, or movement, we currently seek in films, is nothing more than restlessness.

To my eyes and ears, Bresson's films are deeply religious, although he does not speak of them in such terms in these interviews. When he talks of "luck" and "truth" as his method and purpose, I hear a man schooled in faith and perhaps even listening to the Holy Spirit. There may be no other way to explain an artist who prepares for his work like this: "I make a point of forgetting, the night before a shoot, what I'm going to do in the morning so that I'll have a very strong feeling of spontaneity."

But if this is religious instruction, it is in the postmodern mode. For example, Bresson asked his models (not actors) to "learn their lines not as a text that has meaning but like something that makes no sense at all, like a sequence of syllables. . . . I ask that the meaning come from them, from their own impulse, in the moment when . . . I let them loose in the world of the film."

When Bresson talked about Bresson—which he did a lot, over a long career—he did often speak about spiritual matters. In an interview from 1973 that's not included in this book, Bresson quotes Milton's *Paradise Lost* to explain why he doesn't crowd films with music and other diversions: "Silence was pleas'd." He further explains, "I try to catch and to convey the idea that we have a soul and that the soul is in contact with God. That's the first thing I want to get in my films—that we are living souls" (see *The Films of Robert Bresson: A Casebook*, by Bert Cardullo).

Many of the interviewers comment on Bresson's bright, joyful appearance—his blue-green eyes that light up, the smile that flashes on his face, and an open expression and attitude toward life. He was, indeed, a man full of life on the outside. Yet his films were full of brooding. Bresson was a paradox. One of his interlocutors says it best, near the end of this book: "What matters to you [Bresson] is what can't be seen."

BookMarks

Motherprayer: Lessons in Loving

By Barbara Mahany
Abingdon, 224 pp., \$18.99

Barbara Mahany was a pediatric oncology nurse before she became a journalist for the *Chicago Tribune*. In this collection of brief prayerful meditations, Mahany writes with effusive conviction about the joys and challenges of mothering—including her experiences with infertility and miscarriage, being in a Catholic-Jewish interfaith marriage, and raising sons born nearly a decade apart. "It takes love," she explains. "Deep-veined love. The sort that reroutes all the wires inside you. That literally re-scripts your dreams, gives center stage to the newest, dearest soul in your life, one you suddenly realize you can't live without."

Kingdom of Olives and Ash: Writers Confront the Occupation

Edited by Michael Chabon
and Ayelet Waldman
Harper, 448 pp., \$16.99 paperback

Pulitzer Prize-winning authors, National Book Award winners, and a Nobel laureate are among the contributors to this anthology of narratives from the Palestinian territories. Novelists Ayelet Waldman and Michael Chabon invited two dozen writers to visit the West Bank and Gaza and write about their experiences. The beautifully written essays highlight the complexity and hopelessness that residents of the region live with daily. "Walking alone on the streets of Gaza City is a test of the soul's capacity to trust," writes Dave Eggers. But amid the trauma are moments of deep connection. Jacqueline Woodson finds herself "as surprised by a red-haired Palestinian as he is by a brown-skinned Afroed woman. And then we aren't surprised. We are just who we are."

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notes from the GLOBAL CHURCH

by Philip Jenkins



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Doing Our Part to End Hunger

Mercedita once lived in poverty, working as a domestic worker away from her home country of the Philippines. Now she is a leader who helps Filipino farmers grow more food for their families and communities. Her work is part of a program supported by the U.S. government.

In the fall of 2015, after the U.S. visit of Pope Francis, our country along with other nations committed to ending extreme hunger and poverty by 2030. To get on track to reach this goal, people from many religious traditions are urging Congress to pass a budget that adequately funds programs vital to hungry people in the United States and around the world.

You can be part of this hopeful effort. Plan now to involve your church in *Bread for the World's 2017 Offering of Letters*. A handbook, poster, and bulletin inserts are all available — free of charge.

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Charismatic in Chile

When talking to evangelicals in Latin America or Europe, the conversation turns with startling frequency to Chile and specifically to the great revival that began there in the 1970s. Whether through direct influence or as an inspiration, that movement has had a transforming effect far beyond Chile itself. Without knowing that story, we are missing a crucial component of modern global Christianity.

Chile has long been one of the most European parts of Latin America. The country is highly urbanized, with around a third of the national population—some 6 million people—living in Greater Santiago. Today the country is also a high-tech hub. Its long-standing cosmopolitan quality opened the country to foreign religious influences, and the Pentecostal movement had a major impact only a couple of years after the original outbreak in California in the early 20th century.

Surprisingly, the greatest denominational impact of the Pentecostal movement was in the Methodist Episcopal Church. Missionaries and church authorities from the United States were horrified by the chaotic upsurge of spiritual signs among Methodist believers, and they demanded that the local leader, Willis C. Hoover, disavow the movement. He refused, and the resulting schism produced the country's very influential Pentecostal Methodist Church. It has retained the familiar titles and hierarchy

of the U.S. church, so today it has powerful Pentecostal bishops. (These churches also practice infant baptism.) Although little known in the United States, Hoover is still regarded as a pivotal figure in Latin American church history.

Protestants (*evangélicos*) long remained a small minority, making up less than 5 percent of Chile's population as late as 1970. Matters changed rapidly during years of political and social turmoil. In 1970, the country elected a Marxist-led government headed by Salvador Allende, which was overthrown by a military coup on September 11, 1973—a date that still has a profound resonance across Latin America. Military leader Augusto Pinochet presided over an era of savage repression and jarring economic reforms, remaining in office until 1990.

The political crisis sharply divided Protestants and Pentecostals, creating divisions between churches, and especially between leaders and the grass roots. For decades, Protestants had resented the tight alliance between the ruling elites and the nation's Roman Catholic Church, which enjoyed abundant legal privileges. Chile was one of the last countries to retain the old custom of a national religious celebration, the *Te Deum*, which naturally was held under Catholic auspices. Accordingly, many ordinary Pentecostals favored leftist causes, and that movement began to boom under Allende.

But church leaders leaned toward the



PENTECOSTALS IN SANTIAGO: Making music at a worship service at the *Catedral Evangélica de Chile*.

military government, and they were rewarded appropriately. In 1975, the government created a special patriotic Service of Actions of Grace, attended by Pinochet himself. Today the *Te Deum Evangélico* remains one of the key ritual events of the Protestant year, attended by presidents and dignitaries.

Although these events might have fatally divided the churches, repression had little effect in curbing church growth. Charismatic and Pentecostal churches boomed, and by no means only on the Protestant side: perhaps a quarter of all Chile's Catholics today are charismatic. But the Pentecostal churches, with their emphasis on spiritual gifts, were the most visible signs of revival. To borrow the title of a book by Martin Lindhardt, in those congregations, believers found "power in powerlessness."

Nor were the churches entirely otherworldly in their orientation. In an age when overt political outlets were largely closed, ordinary people turned to the churches for companionship and community, over and above any spiritual comforts. Churches became deeply involved in local activism, campaigning for neighborhood improvements. Churches thus filled the cultural void left by the suppression of civil society. These community enterprises gave the Pentecostals a founda-

tion on which to build following the restoration of political democracy.

Protestant numbers swelled, leading some optimistic observers (especially in the United States) to predict the imminent emergence of a Protestant Chile. The present reality falls far short of that, with Protestants claiming just 15 to 20 percent of the population. But Catholic numbers have declined steeply, to around 55 percent, and over a quarter of Chileans now declare themselves to be secular, atheist, or none. As a result, Protestants represent a solid share of what is now a three-way religious division.

The Pentecostal role in the religious economy is nowhere more apparent than in the mighty Jotabeche Church, one of the world's largest Christian congregations. Since 2007, it has separated from the old Pentecostal Methodist Church and today is known as the Evangelical Cathedral of Chile. It seats 19,000 in its main facility, with 100,000 more followers meeting at dozens of satellite churches. For all the divisions and schisms through the years, Jotabeche proclaims a potent evangelical presence in the heart of Chile.

Philip Jenkins's Notes from the Global Church appears in every other issue.

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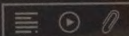
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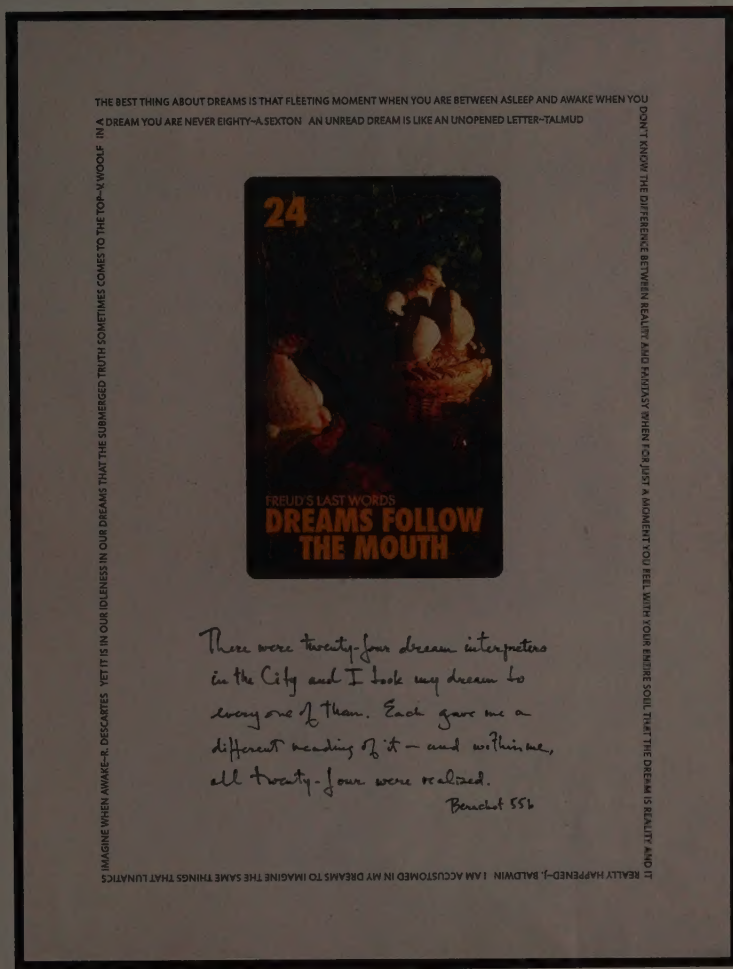
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#24 Freud's Last Words: Dreams Follow the Mouth, by Dana Kadison and Earl Kallemeyn

Mexican bingo cards, or *lotería*, are an unlikely starting point for Talmudic exploration. But artist Dana Kadison and letterpress printer Earl Kallemeyn use the form to create art works that explore texts, including religious texts. They work with letterpress type, digitally create images, and hand-letter other text. Kallemeyn prints the works on old machinery. In *Freud's Last Words*, the handwritten quote is from a section of the Babylonian Talmud in which the rabbis addressed dreams. The text fence around the quote includes commentary and other readings. The open space, says Kallemeyn, honors what is left unwritten, which "may be as potent as what is written."

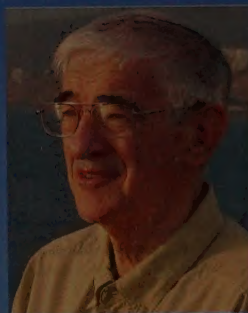
Art selection and comment by Lil Copan, a painter and editor.

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Historical Jesus or apocalyptic Jesus?

John Dominic Crossan is generally regarded as the leading historical Jesus scholar in the world. Educated in Ireland and the United States, he taught at DePaul University in Chicago from 1969 to 1995 and is now professor emeritus in the religious studies department. His best-selling books include *The Historical Jesus*, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, *The Birth of Christianity*, and *Who Killed Jesus?*

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